Gulabrao Maharaj

A Biography

By

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FOREWORD

Shri Gulabrao Maharaj is one of the most outstanding personalities of the 20th Century. He was a transcendent genius touched with the spark of divinity. Born in 1881 A. D., he lived for a short period of 34 years (1881–1915). But within such a brief period, he wrote 132 books on various subjects, particularly on Advaita Vedanta of Shri Sankaracharya and Shri Dnyaneshwar Maharaj, and rendered such glorious service to the country that he is now regarded as one of the immortal saints and philosophers of the modern times.

The Birth Centenary of the Maharaj was celebrated in 1981 when many articles were written and published by eminent writers in different fields, throwing light on various aspects of his philosophy of life. It has been accepted by all of them now that Shri Maharaj has not only contributed substantially to the Advaita Philosophy of Shri Sankaracharya but to the Indian literature and art as a whole In fact there is not a single field of knowledge in which Shri Maharaj has not contributed substantially through his new logical approach. He was a great yogi, a prolific writer, an inspired poet and giant philosopher. It can, therefore, rightly be claimed that Shri Maharaj is one of the greatest intellectual saints of our times.

Shri Gulabrao Maharaj had himself written his autobiography and his disciple Shri Rajeshwar Rao Tripurwar had written extensive biography of Shri Maharaj. This biography is authentic in its true sense since it was read to Shri Maharaj word by word. Recently Dr. Leena Rastogi, Dr. S. D. Kopardekar, Smt. Suniti Aphale, Dr. Ghatate and many other persons have not only published his biographies but also written many articles throwing light on the various aspects of life of Shri Maharaj. Dr. Ghatate in his book has shown how the valuable thoughts of Shri Maharaj can help in enriching our material and spiritual life even in the present scientific age based on intellectualism.

Shri Maharaj was proud of Indian Culture, Indian Art and Indian Philosophy. He had great reverence for our Rishis, Munis, Saints and the ancient Shastras. He had studied the Western philosophy and was acquainted with all the branches of modern sciences. He compared and contrasted the Indian philosophy with Western philosophy and showed how and to what extent they could be reconc liated

The greatest contribution of Shri Maharaj to the Advaita philosophy of Sankaracharya is to remove the common misconceptions with regard to the place of Bhakti or devotion in Advaitic Scheme. Sankaracharya's philosophy has been dubbed as "Illusionism" and he has been accused of having denied the rightful place to Iswara and Bhakti in his philoso-phical frame. Shri Maharaj with his sharp logic (युक्ति) and experience (अनुभूती) however has expounded that Iswara and Brahman are synonymous in Sankar philosophy, the former being the qualified (सविशेष) and the latter, the unqualified or absolute (निर्विशेष) aspects of the same Supreme Reality. He has pointed out that Sankaracharya subscribes to the doctrine of incarnation (अवतारवाद) and as such Iswara could be with form (सगुण) and also be formless (निर्गुण), personal and impersonal.

This apparent contradictory position taken by Shri Sankaracharya with regard to the personal and impersonal God has always created a question mark in the minds of the scholars. Shri Gulabrao Maharaj has, however, solved this riddle by coining a new term of non-illusionary appearance (अनध्यस्तविवर्त) for explaining the position of अवतारशरीर. This has helped to justify the position of incarnation of God as against the position of the world which is illusionary appearance (अनध्यस्त विवर्त) according to the Sankaracharya.

The well known example of rope and snake illustrates the causal relation between Brahman and the world. In this example, the Brahman is misapprehended as world on account of the ignorance of Brahman which is a substratum of the world. Shri Gulabrao Maharaj calls this appearance of the world as false or Mithya. He terms it as illusionary appearance (अध्यस्त विवर्त). As against this, he says, the example of gold and its ornaments does not contain the element of ignorance because the knowledge of the appearance of ornament is not based on the ignorance of the gold which is the substratum of the ornaments. The element of misrepresentation thus has no place in this example. On the contrary the appearance of ornaments creates more attachment for the gold. This he terms, as non-illusionary appearance (अनध्यस्त विवर्त). The incarnations of God are non-illusionary appearances and as such they are as pure as God Himself i. e. सच्चिदानंद स्वरूप. The Bhakti has therefore a place not only before the attainment of Jnan but also even after it (ज्ञानोत्तर). Shri Maharaj is a great advocate of Jnanottar Bhakti and with his new logical arguments he has shown in all his writings that the esssence of Sankar philosophy lies in the diversion of our love towards personal God even after attaining the Advait–Jnan. Real Mukti lies in this state only.

His position with regard to the Jnanottar Bhakti has been supported by Jagadguru Shri Sankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham in his recent article on Bhakti appeared in 'Guru Poornima Volume of 1974.' He says, 'Even people who have realised their oneness with the impersonal God still like to contemplate on God with form and attributes. Even when they have experienced the bliss flowing from the realisation of the identity of the Jeevatma and the Paramatma, and have also realised that God is in everything and everything is in God, they prefer to put aside, for a little while, the experience of this oneness with God, and to contemplate on Him as one slightly different from themselves, like the apparent difference between the waves and the ocean, and to enjoy the divine form'.

It will be clear now that the common misconception with regard to the position of Bhakti in Sankar philosophy is baseless. The real Bhakti, as propounded by Shri Gulabrao Maharaj in his books, is possible only after attaining the Advait Jnan and can, therefore, be established on the solid foundation of Advaita only.

Dr. S. D. Kopardekar is the renowned author on Commerce and Economics. He has also written about 25 books which are recognised by the Universities of Maharashtra. He is interested in spirituality from his childhood. But due to his modern education he is inclined towards intellectual approach. But the approach of Shri Gulabrao Maharaj is based on faith and intellect. This must have defeated the intellectual approach of Dr. Kopardekar. Perhaps that is why he was attracted to Shri Gulabrao Maharaj. This must have inspired him to write the biography of Shri Gulabrao Maharaj in Marathi and in English.

The style of Dr. Kopardekar is literary. His language is inspired. So the readers of this biography will get real happiness based on satwaguna. The literature of Shri Maharaj is like ocean. I suggest to Dr. Kopardekar that he should write articles in different languages and publish them so that the thoughts of Shri Maharaj can be brought to the notice of the young readers in our country.

I must congratulate Dr. Kopardekar for doing this great service to the ardent lover of spiritual knowledge.

Chembur, Bombay.

W. N. Pandit

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

The biography of Shri Gulabrao Maharaj was originally written by me in Marathi for the Annual "Swami Maharaj" in 1982. A revised version of the biography was published in the form of a book in 1983. The book received hearty welcome all over Maharashtra. Some of the readers suggested that I should write it in English also so that the English readers will be introduced to this great saint of Maharashtra. The authorities of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan welcomed the idea and readily agreed to publish the book. I am thankful to them, particularly to Shri Venkataraman, for his co-operation.

Although I have already written 25 books in Commerce & Economics, this is my first literary work in English. I leave it to the readers to judge how far I am successful in portraying the great personality of Shri Gulabrao Maharaj.

The English literary world has already been introduced to the great work of Shri Gulabrao Maharaj through the publication of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan "The Blind Leads the Unblind". This work is the translation of the discourses of Shri Gulabrao Maharaj originally published in Marathi. Shri D. V. Pophli has translated the discourses in English. I am now glad that the personality of Shri Gulabrao Maharaj has also come before them through this biography.

I am really fortunate that Dr. W. N. Pandit agreed to write a foreword to this book. Dr. W. N. Pandit is well known all over Maharashtra as a great intellectual and philosopher. After his retirement as Director of Languages, Government of Maharashtra and a member of the Official Language (Legislative) Commission, Ministry of Law, Govt. of India, he has devoted himself completely to the spread of the philosophy of Shri Babaji Maharaj Pandit. I am happy Dr. Pandit wrote the foreword in a short time on my request.

I am thankful to Shri Vaidya of Tarun Bharat Press, Nagpur for completing the job of printing this book graciously.

I am happy this book is being published in the year of the birth centenary of Shri Babaji Maharaj Pandit, the second Acharya of Madhuradvait *Sampradaya* founded by Shri Gulabrao Maharaj.

I dedicate this work at the lotus feet of Shri Dnyaneshwar Maharaj, Shri Gulabrao Maharaj and Shri Babaji Maharaj Pandit, the trinity of the Madhuradwait *Sampradaya*.

S. D. Kopardekar

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समन्वयमहर्षी, मधुराद्वैताचार्य

श्री गुलाबराव महाराज

१८८१ ——— १९१५

SHRI GULABRAO MAHARAJ

Shri Gulabrao Maharaj has been one of the greatest saints of the twentieth century. He lived a short life of only 34 years from 1881 A. D. to 1915 A. D. But in this short span of life he did really great work. He was a practising yogi, an inspired poet, a prolific writer, a profound philosopher and a saint who had realised God. He wrote 131 books on various subjects in Hindi, Marathi and Sanskrit. For decades, during his life and even after that he has been guiding his followers on the path of spirituality through his literature and teachings.

I. ANCESTRAL BACKGROUND

Shri Gulabrao Maharaj hails from Madhan, a small village 23 miles away from Amraoti in northern Maharashtra. The forefathers of Shri Gulabrao Maharaj had been living in Madhan for generations. Shri Ranojirao, the grandfather of Shri Gulabrao Maharaj, was an ardent devotee of Lord Mahadeo. He used to observe a fast every Monday, the day of Lord Mahadeo. He read religious books regularly. During Navaratri, the Nine Nights Festival, Ranojirao fasted for a continuous period of nine days and on the Mahashivaratri, the festival of Lord Mahadeo, he fasted for a continuous period of eleven days. During the period of fast, he would take only a small quantity of burnt cowdung as

the sacred .'prasad" of Lord Mahadeo. He continued his pratice of observing these fasts meticulously for decades with great faith and ardent devotion.

Once at the time of Mahashivaratri, while observing the fast as usual, Shri Ranojirao had a sacred dream. Lord Mahadeo himself appeared before him in full divine glory. Shri Ranojirao was overwhelmed with ecstatic rapture. He touched the feet of Lord Mahadeo with reverence and prayed for His blessings. Lord Mahadeo smiled and said : 'I am verv happy with your devotion. I give you my blessings. A great saint will be born in your family. He will spread the message of spirituality all over the country and will bring about a great awakening for the upliftment of the masses." Lord Mahadeo left Ranojirao in a beatific trance and disappeared. When Ranojirao woke up with a start, he was full of divine happiness. He exclaimed most devoutly ! "Let my dream come true; Let me have a saint born in my family who would spread the message of spirituality all over the country."

In course of time, Shri Ranojirao got four sons. He had no daughter. His four sons were known as Raghuji, Bakaramji, Narasabhau and Gonduji. The first three sons did not have any child. Gonduji, the youngest son was married to Aloka, the daughter of Shri Vithoba Savai Patil from Loni Takli, a nearby village.

Shri Ranojirao had told his sons about his divine dream. Gonduji and Alokabai remembered and constantly thought of the dream. They too were great devotees of Lord Mahadeo. Both of them followed the path of devotion laid down by Shri Ranojirao. Like their father they too fasted on Mondays, Navaratri days and the Mahashivaratri days. They lived a very pious and devout life. They read religious books regularly, and never missed a religious discourse arranged in Madhan or a nearby village. All the year round, in all seasons, whether it was shivering cold or rains, early morning they would go to the temple to worship and pray to Lord Mahadeo in all earnestness.

2. BIRTH OF SHRI GULABRAO MAHARAJ

By the grace of Lord Mahadeo, Alokabai became pregnant. All the members of the family were happy with this news. The event was celebrated with expression of gratitude and prayers to

Lord Mahadeo. During pregnancy Alokabai had a series of divine dreams. She saw Lord Mahadeo in His various forms in full glory. The Lord showered His blessings on her at the time of each appearance.

For her delivery Alokabai went to her parents at Loni Takli where she gave birth to a son on the 6th of July, 1881 (Ashadha Shudha Dashmi, Shake 1803). It was after many years that a child was born in the Mohod family. So the naming ceremony was celebrated on a grand scale and the child was named Gulab i. e., rose. Thus was fulfilled the great boon granted to Ranojirao by Lord Mahadeo Himself; for, the boy when he grew up became the now famous Saint Shri Gulabrao Maharaj, who brought light into the lives of millions who came to him for spiritual guidance.

Gulab was a bonny attractive infant with exceedingly beautiful eyes. Women of the neighbourhood used to call the child "Sunder Narayan" i. e., the "Beautiful God." Many of them would say that child was the Lord Krishna personified. They used to go to Alokabai every day for fondling the child most lovingly.

Alokabai stayed with her parents until the child was six months' old. Then she returned to her husband's house in Madhan. Here too the women took a great liking for the child instantly. They used to admire his sweet face and healthy form but were most attracted by his lovely eyes. They would sing songs to say that Lord Krishna himself had come to Madhan in the form of "Gulab", the new arrival in the Mohod family. Some of them were so enchanted with the child that they forgot all sense of time in fondling him.

3. SHRI GULABRAO MAHARAJ BECAME BLIND

When Gulab was only nine months old, his eyes somehow got infected. Old ladies in the neighbourhood suggested some herbal medicines. One such herbal medicine was procured and was put into the eyes of infant Gulab. Alas ! It worked disastrously for instead of his eyes being cured, Gulab lost his sight completely, He became blind. Alokabai wailed with agony. She was prepared to sacrifice her life for getting his eye sight back. The neighbouring

ladies wept their eyes out when they heard of the calamity. More medicines were tried, but nothing worked. Gulab had gone blind completely for ever.

Thus it was that Gulab lost his physical eyesight. But Lord Mahadeo in His infinite kindness compensated him by opening his mental eyesight. For, in course of time, it was observed that the intellectual and mental faculties of Gulab developed much more rapidly than those of an ordinary child. Curiously enough the child Gulab began to develop the sixth sense unlike any ordinary human being.

4. CHILDHOOD OF SHRI GULABRAO MAHARAJ

Alokabai the mother of Gulab was greatly worried all the time about her blind son. "What will happen to my blind son ? How will he live his life without his eyes ?" She would wail. But it was found that Gulab was in no way affected by all this. He was always happy. He never wept. He would spend his time in playing alone for hours. Alokabai kept an eye on him all the time even while she was busy in her household work. She was always afraid that Gulab might stumble against something and fall and hurt himself, or that he might hit against a wall. But blind Gulab moved in the house as any other normal person would do. He never stumbled against anything. He would never hit against a wall or a closed door. He would even go to the neighbouring houses without the help of anybody. He would play pranks as any other boy with eyes would do.

When Gulab was four years old, Alokabai got a child, a daughter. After the birth of this child Alokabai became seriously ill and for want of proper medical care her illness got worse day by day. Already she was heartbroken by the disaster that had befallen Gulab. The weakness after the child birth had sapped all her power of resistance and she soon succumbed to her illness. This sudden death of his mother was like a bolt from the blue for Gulab. Rangi, the newly born daughter of Alokabai, also did not survive for more than a few days.

It was most unfortunate that blind Gulab had thus lost the love and affection of his mother when he was just four years old. The death of his mother must have left a deep scar

on the mind of the child Gulab. But outwardly he remained calm and unaffected. Gonduji, the father of Gulab, was worried as to who would take care of the blind boy in the absence of his mother. But Lord Mahadeo in His great mercy took pity on the child and inspired Savitribai (mother of Alokabai and grandmother of Gulab) who was moved with compassion. She came forward to take him under her protection and shower her love and affection on her blind grandchild. Gulab was the only child of her lost daughter. She took him to Loni Takli to live with her. Gulab stayed there for the next six years.

5. GULAB AT LONI TAKLI

Savitribai loved Gulab with all her heart. But her sons and daughters–in–law (the uncles and aunts of Gulab) looked on him with disfavour. They did not like that Savitribai should have brought this blind child to stay in their house. They were all greatly displeased. They all ill–treated Gulab without exception. But Gulab endured it all without a word of complaint. Even when his uncles and aunts passed nasty remarks, he would remain calm and quiet. He would never answer back. He would play alone for hours together.

It was indeed most unfortunate that Gulab had lost first his eyes and then his mother. Besides his relatives ill–treated him and neglected him. It seems it was a great loss to a small child of only four years. Yet this loss was more than compensated for by the extra ordinary quick development of his intellectual faculties and by the unusual awakening of the sixth sense in him, unlike in other ordinary human being. Gulab could easily notice what others could not see with their own eyes. Gulab could apprehend with the power of his mind what others could not perceive with their physical and mental faculties. His grandmother realised this phenomenal growth of the faculties of this blind child. She was overwhelmed with gratitude for this wonderful grace of God.

When Gulab was only five years old, he spread his hands at the time of taking food. It was as if he was welcoming some invisible body before him and wished to offer his food to him, before he started eating. The grandmother did not understand

this. She would say, "Gulab what are you doing ? Whom are you welcoming ? Why don't you take your food ?" But her questions did not reach Gulab, for he would be lost in talking to the invisible someone before him.

When his grandmother had repeated her questions 4/5 times Gulab would awaken. He would say : "Granny, a beautiful child had come. He had four hands. He had a golden robe and a crown on His head. He had golden ornaments in His ears. He was anointed with the paste of sandal on His forehead. He had a peacock feather on His crown. I was welcoming Him and offering Him food," The grandmother would be overwhelmed with joy seeing that this was indeed the description of Lord Krishna as a child. She realised that her grandchild was not an ordinary child. All love and affection would well up in her heart and she would joyfully hold her grand-child close to her bosom.

Though Gulab was blind, he could move in the house easily like any one else. He would go to the well behind the house and sit on the parapet (wall) encircling the well. The grandmother would be worried. She would shout : "Be careful, you might fall in the well." But Gulab was not afraid. He enjoyed sitting on the parapet. Women in the neighbourhood used to go to this well for fetching water. They knew that this blind boy had unusual faculties. When Gulab was sitting on the parapet of the well, they would come silently and stand in a row behind him. Gulab would unmistakingly tell them their names in the order in which they stood. They would ask him with surprise : "How do you recognise us even if we come silently without speaking even a single word ?" Gulab would say : "It is true that you did not speak. But the jingle of your bangles and the anklets on your feet tell me your names."

The ladies would say : "But everyone of us has bangles on her hands and anklets on her feet." "Gulab would say : But the jingle of the bangles and the anklets is different for each." The ladies could not contradict him. The inner perception of Gulab was thus immensely developed even in his childhood and he could apprehend what was happening around him through this inner perception and non-physical faculties.

6. AUGURIES IN CHILDHOOD

Gulab could predict many future events even at that early age. If he met a pregnant woman he could predict whether she would get a son or a daughter and every time his prediction came true. Once he told a pregnant woman that she would get twins and what a surprise ! She did get twins.

Once a distant relative of Gulab's grandmother came to meet her. He told her that his marriage was settled and that it would be celebrated at his village on a particular auspicious day suggested by the priest. He requested Gulab's grandmother to attend the marriage ceremony.

Gulab was playing alone in the same room. On hearing the request of the man, he stopped his play, fixed his blind gaze on the man and spontaneously predicted : "The marriage will be celebrated without a difficulty. But while returning from the marriage, a poisonous snake will bite you and you will die on the spot." All were started. The man was furious. He said : "Your grandmother has spoiled you by over-fondling. You are a spoilt child." Gulab was not angry. He said quietly, 'I speak what I foresee. I do not envy anybody nor am I angry with anybody." The man left the house in great anger. But he could not escape his destiny. For, while returning from the marriage celebrations he was bitten by a poisonous snake. As was predicted, he died on the spot.

The name of one of his maternal uncles was Bajirao. When his first wife died, he married a second time. The new wife Janabai wore silver anklets on her feet as was customary. When she walked the anklets made a particular jingle. Within a few days after the marriage, Gulab told his grandmother : "Granny, did you hear the jingle of the ornaments on the feet of my new aunty? Is it not peculiar ? It seems her husband would die shortly and she would be a widow at an early age."

The grandmother was shocked to hear that. Her fond grandchild was telling her that she would lose her son shortly. She could not bear those words. She pressed her hand on the mouth of Gulab to stop him saying anything further. But her

inner mind repeatedly told her that the predictions of her grand-child came true invariably. As foreseen by Gulab, his uncle did die after four years and Janabai became a widow before she was out of her teens.

7. QUEST FOR THE DIVINE

Gulab had no interest in eatables or in playing with children of his age. He would accompany his grandmother invariably whenever she attended the religious discourses in the nearby temples. He would listen to the discourses with rapt attention. Gulab's grandmother had inherited certain idols which had been in the family for generations. She had great faith in them. She worshipped them daily. Gulab would sit beside her at the time of worship and ask her many questions. At times he would sit before the idols with closed eyes. His grandmother would say, "Gulab is in meditation."

One day his grandmother and a maternal uncle visited the famous temple of the goddess at Mahur. Gulab accompanied them. He asked a number of questions to his grandmother when they were worshipping the deity. The grandmother could not answer all those questions relating to the deity. Gulab asked many questions to the priests of the temple about the history of the temple and the spiritual influence of the deity. He showed great interest in the legend about the temple and about the deity. He was satisfied when he got all information and when he was allowed to touch the idol.

Gulab used to attend the spiritual discourses in the nearby temples invariably. Some of the priestly families in and around Loni Takli used to read the scriptures regularly. Gulab would go to these houses and implore them to allow him to sit there. He would listen to the scriptures with rapt attention. He would ask questions to the elders regarding the message of the scriptures.

Shri Lakshman Bhat, one of the chief priests in Loni Takli, had great affection for Gulab. He taught Gulab many verses in Sanskrit and religious poems in Marathi. Gulab learnt by heart almost all the verses which Shri Lakshman Bhat knew Gulab also met Muslim families in Loni Takli. He showed great interest in

Koran, the sacred Book of Islam. He would implore them to recite verses from the Koran. Gulab had even learnt by heart many such verses.

8. BACK TO MADHAN

When Gulab was ten years old, Gonduji, his father, got married again. The maternal uncles of Gulab were always reluctant to keep him in their house at Loni Takli. So when Gonduji got married again, he called Gulab back to Madhan.

It was really unfortunate that Gulab's stepmother hated him. Instead of giving motherly love and affection to this blind boy she ill-treated him. She would openly say that blind Gulab was a nuisance for her. She would call him names and would wish that Gulab was dead. Once or twice she went to the extent of putting poison in some eatables and offering them to Gulab with the intention of killing him. But God is kind. Gulab's aunt (wife of father's brother) came forward to love him. Gulab used to call her "Tai". Actually Gulab was the only son of Gonduji. Gonduji's three brothers had no children. But except Tai, nobody loved him or cared for him. Gonduji's mind was poisoned by his new wife and so he too ignored his blind son.

At Madhan also Gulab attended all religious discourses. He would persuade elders to read scriptures for him. He would request Tai, his aunt, to give some token gift in the form of foodgrains to those who read scriptures for him. Even at that age Gulab would not like others to do something for him without taking something in return.

Children of his age spent time in playing games. But Gulab would sit alone and worship stone idols. A Christian missionary used to visit Madhan. Gulab would implore him to read the Bible for him. He would also request a Parsee family in Madhan to read "Zendavesta", the holy Book of Zorathushtra.

9. MEDITATION

Gulab would meditate at night regularly for 3 to 4 hours. He would start his meditation after others had gone to sleep. One night, when Gulab was meditating as usual, Bhikabhau, a neighbour, came to his room. He had just returned after attending the late

night "Kirtan," the session of devotional songs in the temple. To his great surprise, he saw Gulab sitting motionless like a stone statue. Bhikabhau felt very troubled. Was Gulab still breathing? Had he stopped breathing ? He held his finger before the nose of Gulab to find out. No breathing at all. Was Gulab dead ? He called Gulab's uncles and nearby neighbours hurriedly. They did not know what to do. They were all terribly worried. An hour passed, two hours passed, three hours passed. At last at 4 o' clock in the early morning Gulab started breathing.

Gulab's uncles could not understand that Gulab had gone into a yogic trance. They thought it was some mischief on the part of Gulab So they got furious. "What is this nonsense !" The eldest uncle shouted. But Gulab left the room without answering back as a token of respect for the elders.

Next day he told Bhikabhau that he was in 'Samadhi', the yogic trance, after meditation and that this happened regularly every night.

10. GULAB'S TEACHER BECAME HIS DISCIPLE

At Madhan, when Gulab was in his eleventh year, his uncle thought that Gulab should be given some schooling and should learn some arithmetic.

At that time Shri Ramarao Deshpande had come to Madhan as a school teacher. He was a Sanskrit scholar. He had studied the Gita, the Upanishads and other Sanskrit scriptures deeply.

Now a blind boy could not be admitted to the school. So Gulab's uncle took him to Ramarao at his residence and requested him to teach the boy some simple useful exercises in arithmetic. Intending to start him in the numerical tables, Ramarao recited the first table, i. e. the table of the twos. Gulab repeated it instantly without a mistake after listening to his teacher only once. Ramarao continued with the tables in their order. Gulab learnt by heart all the tables in one day and urged his teacher to teach him some more. Ramarao was astonished. Such quick intelligence and wonderful memory was never known or even heard of.

Next day Ramarao taught him some simple rules of Sanskrit grammar. Gulab quickly mastered them also. Gulab had no formal education of any kind till then. Yet within a few weeks he had learnt Sanskrit grammar and was able to speak in Sanskrit with ease. Ramarao was simply stunned. Now he started reading the Gita for Gulab. He began to explain the meaning of the verses read by him. But Gulab could interpret them in different ways. Now Ramarao realised that Gulab knew much more than what he himself had learnt. He read the Gita, the Upanishads and many other books and scriptures in his possession, along with Gulab. These sessions continued for a few months.

One golden day it dawned upon Ramarao that he should learn spirituality and philosophy from Gulab. So he touched the feet of Gulab as a mark of reverence and prayed to him to accept him as his (Gulab's) disciple. A miracle had taken place. The teacher had now become the disciple. The news spread like wild fire in and around Madhan. Now people started referring to Gulab as Shri Gulabrao Maharaj or simply Shri Maharaj.

For the villagers in and around Madhan, Ramarao was perhaps the most respectable and learned person. When he accepted Gulab as his spiritual master, many other villagers started coming to meet Shri Gulabrao Maharaj regularly to hear his talk about God and the wonders of spiritual experience. Even at that early age, Gulab started telling them of the legends from the Sanskrit epics and the Puranas and their spiritual significance.

II. MARRIAGE OF GULAB AND THEREAFTER

One day Shri Gulabrao Maharaj had gone to Shri Sitaramji Bhuyar, one of his neighbours. Mainabai, the mother of Sitaramji, was sitting at the entrance of the house with her grand daughter in her lap The old lady told Shri Gulabrao Maharaj in a jocular mood : "If you break this coconut in one stroke with your bare hand, I would marry my granddaughter to you." Shri Gulabrao Maharaj accepted that challange. He broke the coconut in one stroke with his bare hand. He then said : "I would marry this girl at an appropriate age." When Shri Gulabrao Maharaj was eleven years old, a marriagable age

according to the custom of that period, his marriage was celebrated with the same girl. She was seven years old at that time.

On the day of the marriage, it rained very heavily The pandal specially raised for the marriage, was completely drenched. There was no dry place to sit any where in the pandal. At last some empty gunny bags were spread out in the pandal and even while it continued to rain, the marriage of Shri Gulabrao Maharaj was celebrated. His wife was named "Manakarnika."

Even after his marriage, he was never interested in spending time with his wife. He would spend most of his time with Ramrao Deshpande and the priestly families in the village. He had an unsatiable thirst for spiritual love. In his personal life he observed the rules laid down in the Shastras (religious books) meticulously. Though he possessed great knowledge or perhaps because it was so he was always humble and simple. He had a lovely way of speaking even at that young age. People observed that this boy had an exceptionally sharp intellect and he used to explain religious doctrines and principles in a lucid, straight-forward and homely manner. He was a very good conversationalist. Still he was unassuming all the time.

12. THE FORESEEN ACCIDENTS

In 1895 A. D. in the month of March, Shri Gulabrao Maharaj had gone to Loni Takli to attend the marriage of one his relatives. Just before the day of the marriage, the sister of the grandmother of Shri Gulabrao Maharaj decided to go back to her village for some urgent work. Shri Gulabrao Maharaj heard her telling her sister of her decision. The grandmother noticed that Shri Gulabrao Maharaj was listening to her attentively. She realised that he was foreseeing something and would say it openly. So before Shri Gulabrao Maharaj opened his mouth, she assertively told him : "Please keep quiet. Don't say anything. Shri Gulabrao Maharaj kept quiet for some time. Then he said : "Well ! would it not do if she does not start today ? His grandmother said in an assertive tone : "She may go or may not go today. But you keep quiet. For God's sake please do not say anything." Shri Gulabrao Maharaj thought for a moment. Then he said : "Please tell her not to go today. If she does, she would have to suffer greatly."

Nobody listened to Shri Gulabrao Mahraj. The sister of his grandmother started for the village the same day in a bullock-cart. On the way the bullock-cart met with an accident. It was overturned completely. She was seriously wounded. Though she survived, it took months for her to recover her normal health.

Shri Gulabrao Maharaj had come to Loni Takli to attend the marriage ceremony of his relative. The day of the marriage dawned. The marriage was celebrated at the auspicious predetermined time. At night the bridegroom and the bride were to be taken to a temple to get the blessings of the deity for the new couple. Shri Gulabrao Maharaj said that they should not start for the temple at the hour. Nobody listened to him. The bridegroom and the bride started for the temple in a procession. Some fire-crackers were kept in the pandal. By mistake the person carrying a 'mashal' (lighted torch) dropped it on the fire crackers There was a great explosion. Two persons died on the spot. Many persons were injured. The procession of the new couple had to be cancelled.

The next day Shri Gulabrao Maharaj said in the morning. "Somebody would fall today into the nearby well." Since on the earlier day the people had experienced how Shri Gulabrao Maharaj could foresee bad events there was a great panic. Shri Gulabrao Maharaj said calmly "No need for worry. A girl would fall into the well. But she could be taken out alive. No danger to her life." The same evening a girl fell into a well. She was however immediately taken out. She survived as she was treated in time.

13. INITIATION INTO THE MAHANUBHAV SECT

The grandmother of Shri Gulabrao Maharaj was a follower of the Mahanubhav sect, a particular religious group in Maharashtra. When Shri Gulabrao Maharaj was at Loni Takli, Shri Karanjkarbuva, an old saint from that sect had come to the village. Shri Gulabrao Maharaj met him. He showed great interest in the philosophy of the Mahanubhav sect. Shri Karanjkarbuva gave a book of that sect to Shri Gulabrao Maharaj. Shri Gulabrao Maharaj got it read and he learnt it by heart within two days. He then discussed with Shri Karanjkarbuva how some of the important verses in that book could be interpreted in different ways.

The Vedas are the most ancient literature available to mankind. Shri Gulabrao Maharaj had studied the Vedas, particularly the Samaveda. At the request of Shri Karanjkarbuva Shri Maharaj recited some of the verses from the Samaveda in the traditional style of recitation. He then discussed with Karanjkarbuva the principles of classical music. Shri Karanjkarbuva was greatly impressed by the study of Shri Gulabrao Maharaj at the tender age of 15 years. He said : "Gulabrao is Bal Brihaspati," a child incarnation of Brihaspati, the legendary sage in Hindu mythology.

Karanjkarbuva accepted Shri Gulabrao Maharaj as his disciple. He gave some idols to Shri Maharaj and asked him to do meditation and worship the idols daily as per the tradition in the Mahanubhav sect.

Patilbuva the eldest uncle of Shri Gulabrao Maharaj, came to know about his initiation into the Mahanubhav sects. So he was not happy when he knew that Gulabrao Maharaj had taken initiation into that sect. He called back Shri Gulabrao Maharaj and asked him to throw away the deities given by Karanjkarbuva. But Shri Gulabrao Maharaj continued the worship and meditation in spite of this stiff opposition.

In course of time, when Shri Gulabrao Maharaj studied the philosophy of the Mahanubhav sect in depth, he found many deficiencies in it. He also noticed many malpractices in the sect. Then he criticised the sect openly. He did it in the course of time when he was convinced about it and not because his uncle opposed it.

14. IN DEPTH STUDY OF DIFFERENT BRANCHES OF KNOWLEDGE

Shri Gulabrao Maharaj was very eager to study different branches of knowledge. He collected many books on religion, philosophy and physical and occult sciences. Whenever he heard about a good book on these subjects, he tried his best to get it. "Beg, borrow or buy" was his principle in collecting books. He made a big wooden box and kept all these books in it systematically. He regarded these books as his greatest treasure and he took great care of his books, more than that of anything else.

Chandur Bazar, a small town, is 10 miles away from Madhan. Shri Rupchandji, a great Sanskrit scholar and an astrologer, lived at Chandur Bazar. Gulabrao Maharaj would walk this distance alone without anybody's help with his box of books on his head. Shri Rupchandji had great affection for Shri Gulabrao Maharaj. In age, he was like a grandfather to Shri Gulabrao Maharaj. But they discussed astrology and many occult sciences at great length on the same wavelength. Shri Kuryabhai, his son, was like a father to Shri Gulabrao Maharaj in age. He was also a great Sanskrit scholar. He had studied Indian philosophy in depth. He also used to discuss philosophy with Shri Gulabrao Maharaj for hours together.

In course of time, Kuryabhai realised that, even at the tender age of sixteen, Shri Gulabrao Maharaj knew much more than himself. Before he met Shri Gulabrao Maharaj, he believed in the "Dwaita doctrine of philosophy." But after discussions with Shri Gulabrao Maharaj, he realised the limitations of his own study and knowledge. One day, he touched the feet of Shri Gulabrao Maharaj and prayed to him to accept him as his disciple. He accepted Shri Maharaj as his spiritual master.

Shri Eknath Barhate was a Theosophist. He lived at Brahmanwada, a nearby town. He had studied yoga in depth. Shri Maharaj used to go to Brahmanwada to meet Shri Barhate and discuss Theosophy and yoga with him. One day Shri Barhate also realised the limitations of his knowledge and accepted Shri Gulabrao Maharaj as his spiritual master.

Shri Maharaj also used to visit Jain, Parsee, Muslim and Christan families to discuss the teachings of their religions.

On one side, Shri Gulabrao Maharaj was a gigantic scholar. He could easily apprehend the books of different religions. But on the other hand he was a teenage boy. When he met boys of his age, he would play games like "seek and hide." But such occasions were rare. He used to play pranks like boys of his age. He would go to a bylane in his village and make barking sounds like a dog Many dogs would gather and bark at him. Shri Maharaj enjoyed the fun.

15. INSPIRED WRITINGS

At the tender age of sixteen Shri Gulabrao Maharaj experienced the awakening of the divine inspiration in him. He now composed many poems. Boys write poems at this tender age on calf love, beauty of Nature, love and affection of family members, etc. But to every body's surprise Shri Gulabrao Maharaj wrote poems on yoga and spirituality. He composed many poems on the ideas in the Upanishads, like Divine Love, Union with the Divine, Divine Compassion, Blessings of the Almighty, etc. At the age of sixteen, he wrote a series of articles to show deficiencies in the philosophy of the Mahanubhav sect. He also wrote an essay to explain the philosophy of Shankaracharya about, "How life is a myth and this world is false, and how Brahma is the only Truth." He wrote many poems depicting the finer shades or the emotions of the Gopis in Gokula, how they loved Lord Krishna, how they pined for union with Lord Krishna on the spiritual plane.

16. FATHER'S DEATH AND THEREAFTER

In 1896, epidemic of the plague spread in Maharashtra. A number of persons in Madhan caught the infection and most of them died in a day or two. The wife of Shri Gulabrao Maharaj was also affected. She, however, recovered. But Gonduji, the father of Shri Gulabrao Maharaj, became a victim of the plague and died the same evening. Tai, his aunt who had loved Shri Maharaj and had protected him all the time. also died in the epidemic.

Shri Gulabrao Maharaj had lost his mother when he was only four years old. Gonduji had married again. The stepmother had no love for Shri Gulabrao Maharaj. She would force Maharaj to do all menial jobs in the house. She would use very nasty language all the time to address him. She never gave him good food. He was served with stale left-over food of the previous day and often even these were not enough to make a full meal. Patilbuva, the eldest uncle of Shri Maharaj, also hated him. He spared no words to shower his wrath on Shri Gulabrao Maharaj.

All the three brothers of Gonduji had no issue. Shri Gulabrao Maharaj was the only heir of all the ancestral property.

But what he received was hatred and bad names from his stepmother and from his uncles. At times, Shri Maharaj would become gloomy and dejected due to this ill treatment. But such moods of dejection were temporary. He would recover very quickly.

One day in such a mood of dejection Shri Maharaj took forty tolas of somal brought by Patilbuva. (Somal is a deadly poision which kills a person instantly). Then Shri Gulabrao Maharaj went to the temple of Lord Mahadeo and swallowed the entire quantity of the poison. He became unconscious. The news spread in the village like a wild fire. His friends and relatives rushed to the temple. Patilbuva brought Shri Maharaj to the house in an unconscious state. The relatives and neighbours sat by his side the whole day and night. They thought Shri Maharaj would not survive.

At 4 o'clock in the morning, there was some movement in the body of Shri Gulabrao Maharaj. He regained consciousness. He asked them to give him some butter. It was given to him and Shri Gulabrao Maharaj slowly recovered. His uncle was touched to his heart. He said : "Gulab had consumed forty tolas of somal poison, sufficient to kill 5–6 persons. Still he survived. He is not an ordinary man." But this awakening of affection of Patilbuwa was short-lived.

In spite of this unpleasant incident, the ill-treatment of his stepmother and uncle continued. Even though Shri Gulabrao Maharaj was blind, he was asked to fetch water from the well at any time even at night. He was also asked to collect cowdung and make flat cakes thereof for fuel. He used to do all these odd jobs without a word. But what he received in appreciation was just nasty remarks and curses from his stepmother and the uncles.

Though he was not respected by the members of his family, day by day the knowledge and the saintly nature of Shri Gulabrao Maharaj were appreciated more and more by the neighbours. The villagers in and around Madhan began to respect him. One person from a nearby village used to come

regularly to learn Yoga from Shri Gulabrao Maharaj. He used to say, "Shri Gulabrao Maharaj is a great Yogi and it is possible for him to perform any miracle." Many nearby villagers started coming to meet Shri Gulabrao Maharaj to understand religious scriptures from him. He would explain the teachings of religious books in simple words which could be understood by them very easily.

Shri Gulabrao Maharaj knew many herbal remedies prescribed in the science of Ayurveda. He used to give herbal medicines to the needy patients free of charge.

Shri Ramrao Deshpande, a school teacher, had accepted Shri Maharaj as his Guru when Shri Maharaj was only twelve years old. Since then, Shri Maharaj used to visit his house every day. He would sit in Shri Ramrao's house and compose religious songs. Ramrao and his wife regarded him as a member of the family. He would request Shri Ramrao's wife to give him something to eat when he was hungry.

Though Shri Maharaj was only sixteen, he could explain the Gita in the Marathi Language. His discourses on the Gita were liked by the villagers. One listener said, "we are spellbound by his teaching." He persuaded Shri Maharaj to explain the Gita every day in the evening. Occasionally Shri Maharaj gave lectures on other scriptures also. In course of time he started giving discourses on Dnyaneshwari, the greatest creation in the Marathi Language. It was composed in the twelth century by Shri Dynaneshwer Maharaj at the age of sixteen. In the nineteenth century Shri Gulabrao Maharaj interpreted it most appropriately at the same age of sixteen.

17. THE WICKEDNESS OF HIS STEPMOTHER

The stepmother had an eye on the family property. She was afraid that Shri Gulabrao Maharaj might ask her for a share in the family property. Legally, Shri Gulabrao Maharaj

was the only heir of the family property as he had no brother or sister. His three paternal uncles had no issue.

The stepmother of Shri Gulabrao Maharaj opened her mind to some of her neighbours and said that she would do everything to see that Gulab was dead.

When Shri Maharaj came to know about this, he realised that it was dangerous to stay in the ancestral house. He felt very sad. He said : "I am not at all interested in the family property. Let the entire property be enjoyed by my mother." He left the house for good without anything except his clothes. He went to the temple of Lord Mahadeo. Rangubai, the wife of Shri Ramrao Deshpande, his one time teacher and now his disciple, went to the temple and brought Shri Maharaj to her house. Ramrao and his wife persuaded Shri Maharaj to stay with them as a member of their family. From that day, Shri Maharaj lived with Shri Ramrao for the next few years.

18. INITIATION AT THE AGE OF SEVENTEEN

From A. D. 1898 onwards Shri Gulabrao Maharaj was widely accepted as a spiritual master. A number of devotees accepted initiation from him as their Guru. He was only 17 years old at that time. Even at that early age, he could study the mental make-up and spiritual development of a person and could guide him properly on the spiritual path. Some of his disciples were more than his grandfather's age. Shri Maharaj taught a number of subjects to his disciples simultaneously, even at that early age.

Manakarnikabai, his wife, was his first disciple. In those days, husband and wife could not talk to each other in the presence of others. It was also customary not to give education to ladies, even in cities. It is difficult to beleive then that in an interior part of northern Maharashtra Shri Maharaj insisted that his wife must get education. He taught her to read and write. He advised her to read Dnyaneshwari and Gita regularly. Though his wife came from a poor family in a village, she picked up

education and started reading Dnyaneshwari and other scriptures in a short time.

Vishrambhau a disciple came to Shri Maharaj regularly to learn the epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata. Sakharam Appa, a practitioner in Ayurveda, learnt Ayurveda from Shri Maharaj. Sakharam, himself a noted Ayurvedic practitioner, always wondered how Shri Maharaj had so much knowledge of that subject, where and when did he get it. Shri Rajaram Deshmukh of Sirasgaon learnt Gita from Shri Maharaj. Shri Ramchandra Bapu learnt Yoga and Smt. Rangubai learnt religious poems from Shri Maharaj. Shri Maharaj explained to her the deeper meaning of those poems. A Muslim disciple used to read Koran and Shri Maharaj explained to him the finer shades of meaning of different verses in Koran. Shri Maharaj taught Upanishadas to another disciple. A Brahmin priest used to come to Shri Maharaj to learn how to recite the Vedas in the traditional style.

One disciple learnt Yoga practice from Shri Maharaj as per an old treatise known as Hathayoga–Dipika. Another disciple learnt "Kapil Gita" from Shri Maharaj. One disciple learnt "Aparoksha Anubhuti" and "Advaita Mimansa". Shri Maharaj used to give discourses to the villagers formally and informally.

19. UPLIFTMENT OF A PROSTITUTE

A sister of Shri Gulabrao Maharaj's mother lived at Kharala. Her name was Tuljabai. Her husband had kept a a concubine named Hirabai. Once Shri Maharaj visited Kharala to meet Tuljabai and her husband. Hirabai had already heard about Shri Maharaj. She thought a great saint like Shri Maharaj would not tolerate her illicit relations with Tuljabai's husband and she was afraid she would have to leave him and perhaps the village also.

Hirabai went to meet Shri Maharaj and narrated to him her entire life story. She said : "Maharaj, I am a prostitute. The

whole world knows that I have committed many sins in my life. I pray to you. Please advise me what I should do to earn my livelihood. I will do whatever you order me to do." She further said : "I am completely dependent on Tuljabai's husband. I have remained faithful to him after I came in contact with him. He provides for my bread. If he leaves me, I have no way to earn my livelihood."

Shri Maharaj listened carefuly to her entire life story. He told her : "Hirabai, you should not leave your present master. Even if his financial condition changes, you should remain faithful to him. He then explained to her. "This worldly life is as transient as a bubble. So one should love god with full devotion. Then only we can say that one has lived a truthful life." He advised Hirabai to read the writings of Shri Dnyaneshwar Maharaj. Hirabai was overwhelmed to hear Shri Maharaj. She was expecting that Shri Maharaj would hate her. But what she received from Shri Maharaj was sympathy and compassion. Shri Maharaj gave her guidance as to what exactly she should do. She promised Shri Maharaj that she would do exactly what Shri Maharaj had told her. During that year she was completely devoted to God. There was a remarkable change in her life, after she met Shri Maharaj. There was great spiritual upliftment in her life within a few weeks. It is unbelievable. But it is true.

Hirabai followed the advice of Shri Maharaj faithfully. She read Dnyaneshwari regularly. She recited the spiritual poems from "Haripath" composed by Shri Dnyaneshwar Maharaj. Gradually her mind was so much purified that she lost interest in material life. She devoted more and more attention to God.

A year passed. Hirabai became seriously ill. She did not recover. But her faith in Shri Maharaj became stronger. At the time of her death, she repeated the name of Shri Gulabrao Maharaj. She folded her hands in obeisance to him and breathed

her last. When Shri Maharaj heard about this, he had tears in his eyes. He remarked : "One who prays to God in sincerity at the time of his death becomes one with God."

It is difficult to say whether Shri Maharaj had foreseen the death of Hirabai when he met her. But it is true that she lived thereafter for one year only. But in such a short time, Shri Maharaj uplifted her to a higher plane.

Shri Maharaj had not given any advice to Tuljabai or her husband. But as Hirabai lived a purified life, this change was reflected in the life of Tuljabai's husband also. He became more and more pious. He remained faithful to Tuljabai for the rest of his life. Tuljabai also showed greatness of mind in forgetting the unpleasant incidents and accepted her husband without reservations. Both of them lived a normal life thereafter.

The above story shows how the blessings of a great saint can transform the life of even a prostitute like Hirabai. The whole story also shows how an ordinary man full of worldly failings can improve his life. Tuljabai's husband had weaknesses for many vices. But Shri Maharaj's blessings changed the entire course of his life. Not only did he remain faithful to Tuljabai, his wife, but he also became more and more religious. Tuljabai was full of gratitude to Shri Maharaj for all the above changes in her life.

20. A CEREMONY TO CONSUMMATE MARRIAGE

Shri Maharaj married Manakarnikabai in 1892, when he was only 11 years old. His wife was 7 years old at that time. It was a custom in those days in Maharashtra to celebrate the marriage at that age. When the wife attained the proper age to consummate marriage, it was customary to observe a ceremony known as "Garbhadhan" and the bride and bridegroom were then permitted to consummate their marriage.

In 1898 A. D. according to the then prevalent custom, the relatives and friends of Shri Gulabrao Maharaj decided to observe the "Garbhdhan" ceremony. Shri Maharaj was not at all interested in this ceremony.

At the time of ceremony, Shri Maharaj said : "If Manakarnika agrees to what I say, I would allow her to complete the religious ceremony." He also said : "She should forget her parents and an ordinary life. She should desire her husband only for spirituality and nothing else."

Manakarnikabai, by this time, had understood the greatness of her husband. Perhaps she had realised in her mind that Shri Maharaj was not born just to lead an ordinary family life. He was born to do some great work. So without hesitation for a moment, she spontaneously touched the feet of her husband and took a vow : "I would not be attached to my parents. I do not aspire for an ordinary family life. I want my husband for spirituality only."

When Shri Maharaj heard this, he was happy. The ceremony was then completed.

It is difficult to believe that a husband of 18 years and a wife of I4 years do not have rosy dreams of an ordinary family life and that they decided to devote their entire life to spiriuatlity. Manakarnikabai lived her entire life according to the vow taken by her. The world has heard the immortal story of Shri Ramakrishna Paramahans and Sharada Mata, his wife, as to how they lived a life based on spirituality. Shri Maharaj and Manakarnikabai also lived the unusual life of spirituality. The chariot of their family life had two wheels–one wheel was devotion to the Almighty and the second wheel was the spread of spiritual knowledge. Both of them devoted all the years of their life to spreading the spiritual message.

21. THE TERRIBLE FAMINE OF 1900 A. D.

The financial position of the family of Shri Gulabrao Maharaj was not very satisfactory. Patilbuva and the stepmother of Shri Gulabrao Maharaj lived beyond their means. There were differences of opinion among the three brothers.

Shri Maharaj had left the house for good. But out of compassion for his family, he gave them many suggestions for creating harmony in the family and for improving the financial position of the family. The elders however did not pay attention to what he suggested.

In 1900 A. D. there was a severe famine in the whole of Maharashtra. The agriculturists found it extremely difficult to get food. In the absence of rain, most of the agricultural lands did not yield. Farmers were starving. They had no fodder to give to their cattle.

The mother-in-law of Shri Maharaj and her children were starving in their own village. The father-in-law of Shri Maharaj had died two years ago, and there was no elderly person in the family to earn for their livelihood. Most reluctantly the mother-in-law of Shri Maharaj came to Madhan village to stay with her son-in-law. She had brought all the other members of the family with her. But she found that her son-in-law himself depended on the neighbours for his own livelihood. No relative of Shri Maharaj was in a position to offer shelter to Maharaj's mother-in-law.

At last Shri Ramrao Deshpande (with whom Shri Maharaj was staying) invited the mother-in-law of Shri Maharaj and her family to stay with him. They stayed with Ramrao until the famine was over. The mother-in-law did the household work of Shri Ramrao and the children in the family attended school. Shri Ramrao was an ordinary school teacher. How much income an ordinary school teacher can earn ? But due to his devotion to Shri Maharaj whom he had accepted as his spiritual master, he bore all the expenses of the family of the mother-in-law of Shri Maharaj until the famine was over.

Though Shri Ramrao had offered shelter to Shri Maharaj, Manakarnikabai, the wife of Shri Maharaj, continued to stay at the ancestral house. The elderly ladies of the family did not treat her well. Even though Shri Maharaj was not staying in the ancestral house, they used to send for Shri Mahraj and tell him to do many menial jobs in the house. For example at midnight, he would be sent for and he would be asked

to go to the well and fetch water for the family. He would be asked to collect the cowdung from the fields and prepare fuel for the kitchen. Shri Maharaj always respected elders in his family. He would do all the menial jobs assigned to him without a word of protest.

Though the elders of his family did not respect Shri Maharaj, the villagers had a deep reverence for him. Most of them had realised how great he was. Shri Maharaj regularly gave discourses in the village and in the nearby towns. During 1898 to 1900 Shri Maharaj gave discourses on 'Hathayoga Dipika', 'Yoga Darshana', 'Kapila Gita', 'Vedanta Darshana'' 'Aparoksha Anubhuti', 'Advaita Mimansa', 'Astadasha Upanishad'' etc. He used to give discourses on 'Ramayana', 'Bhagavata' and 'Dnyaneshwari' also.

22. COMPLETE DEVOTION TO RELIGIOUS WORK

One day Shri Maharaj kept an ornament of his wife with him. He forgot to tell this to his wife. Next day when Manakarnikabai found that the ornament was missing, she was worried. Hurriedly she started searching everywhere in the house. The news spread within no time. The stepmother was furious. She accused Manakarnikabai that she must have given the ornament to her mother who was in a bad financial position. Manakarnikabai just wept. She did not answer back. But Patilbuva and the stepmother used very bad language to blame Shri Maharaj and his wife.

Shri Maharaj was terribly upset to hear this. He was so upset that he went to the temple of Lord Mahadeo. For eleven days he stayed in the temple just praying to the Lord. He refused to eat anything or even to drink water for eleven days. It is said that Lord Mahadeo appeared before him on the 11th day and consoled him. Lord Mahadeo blessed him and instructed him to devote himself completely to spiritual work.

On the 12th day Shri Maharaj returned to the house of Shri Ramrao. From that time on he devoted his life completely to spirituality. He gave discourses, dictated books and articles and composed poems. He refused to go to his ancestral house and to do the menial jobs in his house.

The elders in the family of Maharaj became very wild when Shri Maharaj refused to do the menial jobs in the house. They sent for Shri Maharaj and used many nasty words to tell him that he was not doing any work for the family. Shri Maharaj's uncle said that Shri Maharaj would have to beg from house to house for food in his future life and that he was not worth more than a poor beggar on the streets.

With a balanced mind, Shri Maharaj replied, : "Why should I beg for food? On the contrary, people would be after me with rich food requesting me to take it and favour them. My wife will accompany me and help me in my work; for I have now devoted my entire life for the work of religion only."

In order to instigate Shri Maharaj, the eldest uncle of Shri Maharaj said : "Because you are not capable of earning anything, you have become a saint now. How can you run your house ? How can you earn your livelihood ?" He further said : "Since you have become a saint, we will not give anything to you or to your wife. The entire house and the agricultural property will be given away to a priest as an offering."

Shri Maharaj immediately said : "I am agreeable to this. Please call a priest. I would be happy to give the entire house and agricultural land to a worthy brahmin." The other members of the family used hot words. But Shri Maharaj remained calm and quiet. He told them he was not interested in the family property. His uncle said : "We would not allow your wife also to stay in the family house."

From that day Manakarnikabai also came to stay with Shri Maharaj at the house of Shri Ramrao.

Shri Maharaj was the only legal heir of the entire family property as he had no brother or a sister or a cousin. But he never asked for any money from his uncles. Shri Ramrao Deshpande with whom Shri Maharaj and Manakarnikabai were staying was an ordinary school teacher with a meagre income. But he offered adquate food to Shri Maharaj before he took his own food. Shri Maharaj and Manakarnikabai had to live a poor material life in those days. They would not have sufficient clothes. They had no money to buy anything. But

they remained happy all the while and devoted their time to the spread of spiritual knowledge.

When Shri Maharaj visited other villages and towns to give discourses, he was surrounded by many devotees. The discourses were invariably followed by informal meetings and discussions at night at the places where Shri Maharaj stayed. Such informal discussions continued late in the night.

23. CAME TO SIRASGAON

Shri Rajaram Deshmukh was a rich farmer at Sirasgaon, a village near Madhan. He developed great faith in Shri Maharaj. He used to visit Madhan regularly to hear the religious discourses of Shri Maharaj. He was greatly impressed by his teachings. He took the initiation from Shri Maharaj.

He felt unhappy when he saw how Shri Maharaj was living a poor material life.

He invited Shri Maharaj and Manakarnikabai to stay with him at Sirasgaon. Shri Ramrao Deshpande felt very sad when he heard about this. But he persuaded Shri Maharaj to go to Sirasgaon, first because his means were too limited to offer a decent life to Shri Maharaj and Manakarnikabai. Secondly he felt Shri Maharaj would be happy if he left Madhan, where his relatives lived. His relatives had been maligning Shri Maharaj even though Shri Maharaj did not depend on them.

Shri Maharaj lived for the next few years at Sirasgaon. Shri Rajaram Deshmukh had a big house, acres of land and a number of servants. He paid personal attention to see that Shri Maharaj got all material comrorts.

Shri Maharaj gave regular discourses at Sirasgaon. He visited a number of other villages and towns for giving discourses. Wherever he went, he called all the villagers of different castes and creeds to gather in a temple with their food. At that time he would recite poems, many of which were composed by him spontaneously.

Shri Ganapat Appaji Dhote was a clerk-cum-accountant with a rich farmer at Sirasgaon. He was so infatuated by the teachings of Shri Maharaj that he left his services, accepted

initiation from Shri Maharaj and spent all his life with Shri Maharaj. He noted down the poems composed by Shri Maharaj. He also noted down the discourses of Shri Maharaj which were later published. Shri Ramrao Deshpande with whom Shri Maharaj and his wife had stayed at Madhan came to Sirasgaon every evening. He stayed with Shri Maharaj for the night and returned to Madhan every morning to do his work in the school as a teacher.

Shri Maharaj used to visit nearby villages and towns alone without anybody's help or guidance. He never stumbled on the road. So his followers believed that he could see with his inner perception. Shri Ramrao Jathar has said : "It is wrong to say that Shri Maharaj was blind. He could see what we could not see with our two eyes. A peacock has a thousand eyes on his feathers. But they are useless. Shri Maharaj could see everything with the eyes of his inner perception." That is why people described him as "Pradnya Chakshu", i e. one who could see through the eyes of intellect. It is difficult to believe but it is true that the blind was guiding the unblind.

Shri Maharaj would dictate letters to authors, booksellers and publishers at different places and request them to send him books. He was interested in the books written on occult sciences, development in the physical sciences etc. He collected books in English by Spencer, Hamilton, Myres, Darwin, Annie Besant etc. He also purchased the books on the teachings of Shri Vivekanand, Shri Dayanand Saraswati, Shri Ramakrishna Paramahans, etc.

24. VISIT TO ALANDI IN 1901 A. D.

In 1901, Shri Maharaj, Manakarnikabai and six disciples visited Alandi. This was his first visit to Alandi, the place where Shri Dnyaneshwar Maharaj entered the stage of Samadhi in the twelfth century.

Shri Maharaj was overwhelmed when he reached the temple of Shri Dnyaneshwar Maharaj. Streams of tears flowed from his eyes. He sat at the lotus feet of Shri Dnyaneshwar Maharaj for three days. He did not accept food or water for three days and prayed to Shri Dnyaneshwar Maharaj to

appeear before him. It is said that Shri Dnyaneshwar Maharaj did appear before him on the fourth day, took him on his lap and blessed him. Shri Maharaj said later that by the blessing of Shri Dnyaneshwar Maharaj he got many occult powers. His inner perception developed beyond imagination. He could recite the writings in the books word by word, page after page. He could also understand the speech of others in any language. It is said that in later life, Maharaj understood the speech of others in English, Japanese, German, Bengali, Telugu, Kannada, etc. even though it was not translated to him. He could understand such speech and would reply in Hindi, Marathi or Sanskrit.

25. PRACTITIONER IN AYURVEDA

Shri Maharaj was an authority on Ayurveda. He prescribed medicines in Ayurveda. Every day a large number of patients from Sirasgaon and nearby villages came to take medicine from him.

While giving medicines, Shri Maharaj tried to bend his patients' minds towards spirituality also. He would tell his patients to read scriptures also while they took the medicines. In a number of incidents he gave "tirtha" – sacred water at the feet of the Lord, along with medicines. His devotees believed that the sacred water cured them rather than the medicines.

Shri Maharaj was concerned about the mental and physical health of his devotees all the time. Whenever his devotees were ill, he would visit them to give medicines as per Ayurveda. He would give "tirtha" i. e. sacred water at the lotus feet of Lord. In all these cases, the patients were invariably cured.

Two such instances in 1901 are given below :

Shri Ramachandra Bapu became seriously ill at Madhan. Since Shri Maharaj was not in Madhan, the local doctors were called. The local doctors said that there were no chances of his survival. Shri Maharaj had gone on a tour. A word was sent to Shri Maharaj. He came back immediately and said : "Ramachandra Bapu, you should not die so early. You are still to complete the study of Yogas. I will give you a few more years to live." He placed his hand on the forehead of Shri Ramachandra Bapu. He gave him sacred water. To the great surprise of all, Ramachandra Bapu survived.

The second intance is that of Shri Rajaram Deshmukh. He became seriously ill at Sirasgaon. Shri Maharaj was on a tour. Shri Rajaram Deshmukh said that he would not accept medicine from anybody except Shri Maharaj. The local doctors said that the illness was most likely to be fatal. No chances of survival. His relatives wanted to send a word to Shri Maharaj. But Shri Rajaram Deshmukh prohibited them from doing so. He believed that Shri Maharaj would know by himself and that there was no necessity for sending a word to him about the illness. So the news of the illness of Shri Rajaram Deshmukh was not conveyed to Shri Maharaj.

Shri Maharaj did learn of Shri Rajaram Deshmukh's illness by his sixth sense. He returned to Sirsgaon at midnight. He touched the forehead of Shri Rajaram Deshmukh and gave him sacred water. For seven days Maharaj observed a fast. He performed some japa also. On the eighth day Rajaram Deshmukh was out of danger.

26. SHRI MAHARAJ'S VISIT TO LONI

In 1902, one of the maternal uncles of Shri Maharaj died. So Maharaj went to Loni Takli to console his grandmother The son of his uncle was only four months old. The grandmother kept the child on the lap of Shri Maharaj. He looked at the child and said : "This child would face a great calamity at the age of five, perhaps even death".

Shri Maharaj's grandmother asked him what they should do. How could they save the child from the clutches of death? Shri Maharaj said : "If the mother of the child follows a particular type of worship and performs japa every day, the child might survive."

The mother of the chi'd did not believe in the advice of Shri Maharaj. She did not follow it. At the age of five, the child became seriously ill. In spite of medical treatment, the child died. The mother repented. But it was of no use. She became the follower of Shri Maharaj for the rest of her life.

27. YOGA CENTRE OF SHRI YOGANAND SWAMI

Shri Yoganand Swami, a renowned Yogi, had his Yoga teaching centre at Amraoti. He used to teach how Yoga could

be used to strenghten one's own body so that one could live a better material life.

When Shri Maharaj visited Amraoti, he heard about the teachings of Shri Yoganand Swami. He went to meet Shri Yoganand Swami. The Swami explained how Yoga could be used to make the body stronger. He said the body could be made immortal if proper Yoga practices like Khechari Mudra could be followed. Shri Maharaj said : "Life is as fickle as a bubble. So instead of concentrating on strengthening the body by Yoga, one should surrender to God and follow the path of devotion."

Shri Yoganand Swami could not refute the argument of Shri Maharaj. A number of disciples of Shri Yoganand Swami were present to hear the conversation between Shri Maharaj and Shri Yoganand Swami.

Next day, Shri Haribhau Kevale, Manchar Munshi, Washimkar, Jagjivan, Shirpurkar and many other disciples of Shri Yoganand Swami came to meet Shri Maharaj and requested him to guide them on the spiritual path.

Shri Maharaj explained to them : "Body is mortal. One day, you have to die. Yoga practices to strengthen body will not help you. You must surrender to God and follow the path of devotion. Soul is not mind nor body. Yoga practices like Khechari Mudra would not help you in spiritual development. You should follow the way of spiritual development." Shri Maharaj further explained that Yoga practices like the Khechari Mudra would be an obstacle in the path of devotion to the goal of real spirituality.

All those listeners were greatly impressed. They became followers of Shri Maharaj.

Shri Maharaj gave discourses at Amraoti on "Amritanubhav" written by Shri Dnyaneshwar Maharaj. At night, they used to sing devotional songs and discuss the teachings of the Vedas.

Shri Haribhau Kevale, former follower of Shri Yoganand Swami, was so much influenced that he renounced the wordly life and decided to stay all his life with Shri Maharaj. He accepted it as a mission of his life to take down the dictations of Shri Maharaj. Shri Haribhau was a millionaire. He owned thousands of acres of land. It is said he weighed himself against gold. He left his rich family and stayed with Shri Maharaj in a simple way. He was fast in taking down what Shri Maharaj dictated. A number of books of Shri Maharaj available today have been taken down by Shri Haribhau Kevale.

28. INCIDENT AT CHANDUR BAZAR

In 1903, at Chandur Bazar, a nearby town, a ginning factory was being constructed. Shri Nilkantha Katekar, a disciple of Shri Maharaj, was appointed as the manager of the factory. The construction work was almost complete. A day for the inauguration of the factory was announced.

On the day previous to the day of inauguration, there were torrenttial rains in the area. A river near the proposed ginning factory was flooded.

At night when Shri Nilkanthrao was sleeping, Shri Gulabrao Maharaj came and awoke him. Shri Nilkanthrao was surprised to see Shri Maharaj there. In the torrential rains how could Shri Maharaj come alone at night to Chandur Bazar ? The clothes of Shri Maharaj were not at all drenched though heavy rains were pouring outside.

Shri Nilkanthrao exclaimed : "Maharaj, how could you come here at night in such torrential rains?" Maharaj just said : "I came from Madhan." Shri Maharaj further said : "You need my help. I have come here to help you." He then told him that the nearby river was in flood and there was a danger to the factory. Shri Katekar was frightened. He called the neighbours and removed the machinery and other equipment to a safe place. Shri Maharaj then said that he would like to go back. Shri Nilkantharao Katekar arranged a bullock cart for Shri Maharaj to go back to Madhan.

Shri Katekar was convinced that Shri Maharaj had come there to help him as the factory property was in danger due to the flood in the river.

29. A DEVOTEE AT BRINDAVAN

Shri Damodar Appaji was a great devotee of Shri Maharaj. He was from Arvi, a village near Sirasgaon, where Shri Maharaj was staying. He used to visit Sirasgaon regularly just to meet Shri Maharaj and listen to his discourses. Once he had gone to Brindavan, the place where Lord Krishna had spent his childhood. When Shri Damodar Appaji went to the main temple of Lord Krishna at Brindavan, he saw Shri Maharaj in the place of Lord Krishna. He closed his eyes for a moment and opend them again. Still Shri Maharaj was standing in the place of Lord Krishna's image in the temple. He was overwhelmed with devotion towards Shri Maharaj.

When Shri Damodar Appaji came back from Brindavan, he rushed to Sirasgaon. In a moving tone he said with eyes full of tears, "you are the incarnation of Lord Krishna. I saw Lord Kr shna in your from." Shri Maharaj pacified him.

In later life Shri Maharaj and Damodar Appaji used to have a lot of conversation in private. During such meetings, Shri Damodar Appaji explained his spiritual experiences to Shri Maharaj and prayed for his help in spiritual progress. Shri Appaji revered Shri Maharaj as the incarnation of Lord Krishna all his life.

30. KATYAYANI VRATA – A FESTIVAL OF DEVOTION

From 1904, Shri Maharaj started a yearly festival of devotion known as Katyayani Vrata. Shri Maharaj started the festival to reinstate devotion to Lord Krishna in its purest form.

Following the instructions of Shri Maharaj, his followers gathered at Vathoda, a place on the bank of the river Payoshni in Northern Maharashtra. Shri Maharaj worshipped Lord Krishna and instructed his followers to read Dnyaneshwari.

In the evening Shri Mabaraj gave a discourse to explain Devotion in its purest form. He said, "The devotion of gopis towards Lord Krishna as described in the Bhagavata is an

ideal one. It is devotion par excellence. Gopis' devotion was in its most intense form. They loved Lord Krishna in the most selfless way on the highest plane. Narada has also advised the devotees to develop love towards Lord Krishna as Gopis did in the Bhagavata."

Shri Maharaj advised his followers, "Imagine that you are a gopi for a moment and try to experience at least an iota of their intense love towards Lord Krishna. This is the easiest way to experience union with the Lord."

Shri Maharaj continued to celebrate the Katyayni Vrata, the festival of devotion all his life. His followers celebrate the yearly festival even to-day. Thousands gather at the place on the bank of the river to participate in the worship of Lord Krishna.

To develop selfless devotion in its most intense and the purest form, Shri Maharaj imagined himself to be a daughter of Shri Dnyaneshwar Maharaj and a wife of Lord Krishna. He has written hundreds of poems to depict various shades of emotions in these roles as a daughter of Shri Dnyaneshwar Maharaj and as a wife of Lord Krishna. Sometimes he even used to dress as a woman to experience Madhura Bhakti i e. devotion par excellence at the highest spiritual plane.

Since, 1904 Shri Haribhau Kevale, Nanaji Kavimandan, Vyankatrao Deshpande and a few other devotees always stayed with Shri Maharaj and noted down his dictations. They accompanied him during his visits to other towns also. Shri Haribhau Kevale virtually became his manager and looked after the arrangements of the travel and stay of Shri Maharaj and the devotees who accompanied him.

31. FAMILY LIFE AT THE HIGHER PLANE

Shri Maharaj always wished that Manakarnikabai, his wife, should not expect ordinary family life from him. She had understood him. She realised th_t though her husband was blind, he lived the life at the highest spiritual plane. She, therefore, had taken a vow at the feet of her husband in 1898, "I would not be attached to my parents, I do not aspire to live the ordinary family life. I want my husband for spirituality only."

She lived her life as per this vow all her life. Shri Maharaj always appreciated this.

When she was living at the ancestral house at Madhan with the step–mother of Shri Maharaj, she had to face a very hard life. Patilbuwa, her father-in-law and the step-mother of Shri Maharaj compelled her to do entire household work all the day. She did it without a word of protest. Still Patilbuwa and her mother-in-law never treated her properly. They did not give her enough food. For days together she could not get even a drop of cocoanut oil for setting her hair. She had only torn clothes to wear all the time. On top of that Patilbuwa and the step mother used nasty language every time in addressing her. Life was indeed very difficult for her no love, no affection, no food, no appreciation. Only hard labour all the time. But she bore it all without a word.

When she came to stay with Shri Maharaj at the house of Shri Ramrao Deshpande life became a bit easier. But financial difficulties continued. In spite of that, she never lost faith in her husband. She always looked up to him as her spiritual master.

Shri Maharaj taught her to read and write. He asked her to read Dnyaneshwari and some other scriptures regularly as a spiritual discipline. She observed the practice meticulously with all faith in her spiritual master.

When Shri Maharaj and his wife came to Sirasgaon to stay with Rajaram Deshmukh, she could fully devote herself to the work of Shri Maharaj. She loved him immensely. But their love was only at the spiritual plane and not at the physical level. So the innocent rural folk used to whisper in one another's ears, "what type of husband and wife they are."

The world knows the spirituality of family life lived by Shri Ramkrishna Paramahans and Sharada Mata. Shri Maharaj and his wife also lived life on the same spiritual plane.

At Sirasgaon Shri Maharaj composed poems for women which were like the folk–lore. He composed about 1100 poems and set them to tunes which were simple like folk–tunes. Shri Maharaj and his wife used to sing them together. These songs gave the message of spirituality to the women in the language which could be understood by them

Gradually women developed faith in Manakarnikabai and took counsel with her in their marital difficulties and spiritual problems. She on her part guided them suitably.

In 1903, Shri Maharaj wrote her a letter from Brindavan. This letter is a classic example of spiritualisation of love between husband and wife. Even an ordinary woman can draw inspiration from this letter and take guidance for living a life at a higher plane. Shri Maharaj writes : "please live the life with an eye on spirituality all the time. You should perform all your worldly duties, but keep remembering the Almighty in your heart always even while doing your daily work. You should also purify your heart by remembering the spiritual master. You should spend some time every day to think who you are, from where you have come and where you are going. You are neither a man nor a woman. You are that Brahma, the divine light. The soul is different from the body. When you realise this you will develop real devotion towards the Lord and purify yourself. Relatives are there for their own selfish motives. You should develop spirituality and guide the other women around you on the right path towards the lord. This is what I expect from you in your life."

This letter is in the form of a poem and is a masterpiece of spiritual literature of the highest order. It is worth everybody's effort to try to understand the deeper meaning of it.

Manakarnikabai could fully understand what her husband expected of her. She replied to the letter on the 26th of June 1903. She wrote as under :—

"You are my spiritual master and I would always follow you. I would always practise what you teach me. You have explained to me that I am neither a man nor a woman but that Brahma, the divine light. I fully appreciate this. I also understand

that so long as one lives in the physical body, one should spend one's time in the service of the Lord and the spiritual master, whether one be a man or a woman."

She practised what she wrote. She spent all the time in the service of her spiritual Master. Sometimes, Shri Maharaj got angry with his disciples. At such times she would console the disciples like their mother. She treated all disciples with this affection of a mother. But if somebody committed a mistake, she would not spare words to bring it to his notice, so that he could improve.

Though it took some time for the world to realise the spiritual greatness of Shri Maharaj, she had realised his greatness much earlier. So she followed him on the spiritual path with all sincerity, faith and devotion. In course of time she could aiso give discourses on the Gita and the Dnyaneshwari. In the later part of her life, she guided many women on the spiritual path.

32. BIRTH OF A SON

Though Manakarnikabai kept step with her husband on the path of spirituality all the time, there were occasions when she felt she should have at least one son from Shri Maharaj. She did not, however, open her mind to anybody about this.

Shri Kuryabhai, who was like a father to Shri Maharaj at one time and who had later became his disciple, realised this. He noted that Shri Maharaj had no brother or sister or even a cousin. So in course of time the very existence of the Mohod family would be threatened. The only way in which the family line could continue unbroken was for Shri Maharaj to get a son, thought Shri Kuryabhai.

Whenever Shri Maharaj visited Chandur Bazar he used to stay with Shri Kuryabhai. On one such visit, when Shri Maharaj was resting on a swing, Kuryabhai's wife came forward and prayed : "Maharaj, though I am your disciple, I am your mother's age. With the privilege of my age, I pray to you, please promise me that you will do what I tell you to do."

Shri Maharaj said, "you are indeed like my mother. I would be pleased to do what you want me to. But why do you want a promise ? Please tell me what I should do."

But she insisted that unless Shri Maharaj promised her, she would not reveal what she had in her mind. This argument continued for quite some time. At last, Shri Maharaj yielded. He said, "All right, I promise you, I shall do exactly what you tell me." This made Kuryabhai and his wife very happy, She said, "Maharaj, even the scriptures argue that every married man has a duty to beget at least one son. Please bless your wife with a son, may be only one."

Shri Maharaj was totally nonplussed to hear this. He could not have imagined that such a request would be put before him. He tried to explain that his marriage and family life was on the spiritual plane only. But Kuryabhai and his wife refused to listen They insisted that a marriage after all was a marriage and being a married man Shri Maharaj was a "householder" who, according to the Hindu Shastras, was bound to beget at least one son. He quoted a number of references from the scriptures in support of his argument.

At last Shri Maharaj had to yield, He kept his promise and in course of time Manakarnikabai gave birth to a son in 1905. This is how Shri Anant Mohod, the son of Shri Maharaj was born. The mother–in–law of Shri Maharaj was very happy to look after the mother and the child during and after the birth of little Anant.

33. SPIRITUAL VOW V/S. MOTHERLY AFFECTION

Though Shri Maharaj had got a son now, he continued to remain free from all attachment for, he never forgot the spiritual mission of his life. But things were different now for his wife. It was thirteen years after her marriage, that Anant was born, Anant was her only son, for it was not likely that she would get another child. She was now twenty years old and was so infatuated with the child that she forgot everything else and spent all her time in fondling the child. She even forgot her spiritual vow taken at the feet of her spiritual Master in 1898. Shri Maharaj understood the great psychological change

in her life. But he also knew that for her proper spiritual development, it was necessary for her to overcome this infatuation of her motherly love towards her child and to be more detached from material life.

When Anant was four months old, Shri Maharaj arranged things in such a way that Anant remained with his grandmother at Amraoti and Manakarnikabai accompanied Shri Maharaj to Badnera. Though she went to Badnera, her heart continued to thirst for her child all the time. She felt lost. She longed and pined for her child and nothing else could interest her. When Shri Maharaj noticed her emotional conflict, he permitted her to go back to Amraoti to meet the child. She rushed back to Amraoti and was overjoyed to meet her son. But the spirituality of Shri Maharaj continued to be with her. Thus when she took the child into her arms, her inner conscience reminded her of her spiritual vow taken at the feet of her spiritual master. Her spirituality which was never weak now returned in full force especially in the physical absence of Shri Maharaj. "I want spirituality and nothing else," her conscience pricked her; and at once she realised her folly. She realised that she had lost the balance of her mind and that her affection for the child had become an obstacle to her progress on the path of spirituality. This caused her so much mental agony that being unable to bear it, she became unconscious.

The spirit of Shri Maharaj had all this while been with her. When she regained her consciousness, she had developed the necessary detachment from the worldly life. Now Shri Maharaj himself came back to Amraoti when he heard about this. Shri Maharaj asked her to read the Dnyaneshwari twice. She did this faithfully and with full devotion, and for the rest of her life she could keep the balance necessary for spiritual progress.

34. DIPLOMA IN THEOSOPHY

In those days the cult of Theosophy had become quite popular, especially amongst people who had been educated in English schools. Shri Maharaj decided to study theosophy for he wished to understand why educated people were attracted towards that cult.

Shri Nassarwanji Mancharji a Parsee gentleman from Akola was a follower of Shri Maharaj. He had good contacts with the Theosophical Society and also had a lot of literature about its doctrines and beliefs. Shri Maharaj stayed with Shri Nassarwanji at Akola and studied theosophy deeply enough to get the diploma awarded by the society.

Thereafter he wrote extensively on this philosophy, revealed its shortcomings and deficiencies and showed how the old Vedic philosophy was superior to theosophy. A number of the followers of theosophy returned to the fold of Vedic philosophy when they studied his writings. Shri Vasudeorao Mulay, one of the theosophists, was so much influenced by Shri Maharaj that he prayed to Shri Maharaj to stay with him (Shri Mulay) for a few weeks. He made all the books of theosophy available to Shri Maharaj so that Shri Maharaj could refute the doctrines of that cult. Shri Nassarwanji Mancharji was also disillusioned about theosophy when he heard of Shri Maharaj. He became an ardent devotee of Shri Maharaj in his later life.

35. VISIT TO ALANDI

Shri Maharaj visited Alandi, the place of the Samadhi of Shri Dnyaneshwar Maharaj at least twice a year. Shri Vishnupant Panawalkar, a devotee of Shri Maharaj, got two pairs of the "Paduka" (wooden footware) of Shri Dnyaneshwar Maharaj made in silver and offered them to shri Maharaj. Then in 1905, Shri Maharaj, Shri Panawalkar and a few other devotees visited Alandi along with the two silver "Paduka" pairs. Shri Maharaj offered one pair to the temple. The residents of Alandi were so pleased that they took this silver pair of the "Paduka" out in a big procession in the town.

The other pair of the sacred silver "Paduka" was given by Shri Maharaj to his "Math" (Abbey) at Amraoti for the daily "Pooja" (worship). Shri Maharaj then instructed his followers to take it out in a procession every Thursday. So it was in the lifetime of Shri Maharaj (and even today the practice is continued at Amraoti). Specially for that purpose Shri Panawalkar, one of the devotees, purchased a beautiful image of Shri Krishna and presented it to Shri Maharaj who made all the necessary

arrangements for its worship daily along with the silver pair of the "Paduka".

36. VISIT TO POONA AND BOMBAY

While returning from Alandi Shri Maharaj visited Poona on the way. For 10 days he stayed there with Shri Keshavrao Maharaj Deshmukh, a noted saint of those days. Thousands of his followers came to meet him. Day and night there were discussions on the Vedant philosophy. Shri Nanasaheb Deshmukh the uncle of Shri Keshavrao Maharaj, was a leading physician in Bombay. He happened to be in Poona at that time and was also staying with Shri Keshavrao Maharaj during that period. He was greatly impressed by the personality of Shri Maharaj. He most earnestly urged and succeeded in persuading Shri Maharaj to visit Bombay along with him. Shri Keshavrao Maharaj also accompanied them to Bombay.

Dr. Deshmukh invited the leading lights in Bombay from the medical profession as well as some lawyers, thinkers, political leaders, musicians and educationists to meet Shri Maharaj. Among those who met Shri Maharaj were Barrister Setalvad, the most eminent lawyer in Bombay, Dr. Bhajekar, a leading physician, Shri Manohar Gavai, a social leader and Shri Vyankata Shastri, great Sanskrit scholar. For about ten days there were discussions on various subjects Shri Keshavrao Maharaj Deshmukh has written a biography of Shri Maharaj in which he has described these meetings in Poona and Bombay. He writes : "Shri Gulabrao Maharaj spoke extensively on various subjects including Music, Ethics, Allopathy, Politics, Vedanta, Nyaya, etc. Thousands of people came to meet Shri Maharaj and asked him questions. Shri Maharaj satisfied them all by giving them appropriate explanations of their doubts and problems, which showed how deeply he had studied all these subjects. He would give quotations after quotations from books on these subjects and would state the details of these quotations with page numbers, years of publication, names of the authors and publishers etc. Some of the visitors tried to verify the quotations and they were amazed to find that Shri Maharaj had quoted word by word without a single mistake and even the page numbers quoted by him were correct. All the visitors wondered how a blind person

could study these subjects so deeply and remember the books after books word by word. This was really a miracle, unheard of and unknown in the history of our country."

The crowds of visitors began to increase day by day. So after ten days, being tired of this popularity, Shri Maharaj left Bambay without informing anybody.

Shri Keshavrao Maharaj writes further : "I have not come across any person who had even a half of what Shri Gulabrao Maharaj knew. His memory, intelligence, knowledge and perception were indeed a miracle, most difficult to believe. One had only to see him to believe. Perhaps this was the rarest of gifts given to this child blessed by God Himself. Shri Maharaj was the greatest miracle, nay more than a miracle, which I have myself experienced in my life "

The above remarks of Shri Keshavrao Maharaj as given by him in the biography of Shri Gulabrao Maharaj need no comments.

37. THE DIVINE EYES OF PERCEPTION

From Bombay, Shri Maharaj went to Nagpur and stayed with Shri Vasudeorao Mulay for a few days. In Nagpur, Shri Maharaj gave discourses every evening which used to continue even upto late hours in the night. A large number of his followers attended these discourses.

Once during a discourse late at night Shri Maharaj quoted from a famous religious book titled *Narada Pancharatri*. A devotee asked Shri Maharaj where he could get that book. Shri Maharaj informed him that the book was not printed and as per his knowledge, only two hand written copies of that book were available. One was in the Library of the Royal Bhonsale Family of Nagpur and the other was in a priestly family at Mathura.

Some enthusiastic devotees greatly interested in seeing the book went to the library immediately. Naturally they found that the library was closed and the librarian had gone home. So they went to the librarian's house and persuaded him to come to meet Shri Maharaj. When Shri Maharaj asked him about

the book, he said that the book might be there in the Library. But at that late hour it would be practically impossible to find it. "I can give it to you tomorrow morning," he said.

Shri Maharaj then informed him that the book, *Narada Pancharatri*, was in such and such a cupboard in such and such a room of the library. It had a cover of such and such colour. He also told him the names of the books and those of the authors of the books which were in the shelves above and below the book– *Narada Pancharatri*.

The librarian was greatly amazed. He could not believe this piece of information. But the devotees of Shri Maharaj had great faith in the perception of his divine eyes. They insisted that the librarian must go to the library at that very hour and prove or disprove what Shri Maharaj had said. So the librarian and the devotees all went to the library. They found the book exactly in the position which Shri Maharaj had described. The names of the books and authors above and below the book were also as stated by him. The book was immediately brought to Shri Maharaj.

Now Shri Maharaj said the quotation given by him was on page number so and so. Shri Govind Ramchandra Bhakta opened the book and found the quotation exactly on that page and it read exactly as said by Shri Maharaj, word by word.

How was all this possible ? How could a blind man quote word by word with the relative page numbers ? How could he describe the cupboard in which the particular book was ? How could a blind man see the titles and names of the authors of the books which were above and below it?

It is all unbelievable. But it is true. It had happend in our country. Shri Gulabrao Maharaj had done it. People may say that he was blind as he had no physical eyes. But he was blessed with divine eyes of perception, with which he could observe what persons with normal eyes could not do.

38. ILLNESS OF NANAJI KAVIMANDAN

Once Shri Maharaj was at Nagpur. He was to go the Nagpur railway station to proceed to Yaoli by train.

was noon time on a summer day. There was scorching heat outside. In order to leave for the station, Shri Maharaj told somebody to ask Nanaji to go out and fetch a tonga (a horse drawn carriage) for him to go to the station. The man came back to say that Nanaji had high fever, as high as 104° F. He could not even get up and it was so hot outside! "Would it not do if someone else went out to get a tonga?" Shri Maharaj replied, "No. Nanaji must go out himself and fetch a tonga for me to go to the station."

So Nanaji had to go. He went out most reluctantly, fetched a tonga and then accompanied Shri Maharaj to the station. He went and bought the railway ticket for Shri Maharaj and got him seated in a third class compartment. By that time the train was about to leave. Then Shri Maharaj asked him. "Nanaji, how is your fever?"

Nanaji was surprised to find that he had no fever. He felt absolutely normal. He could not believe it. He said so to Shri Maharaj. In reply Shri Maharaj just smiled. The train started at that moment and Nanaji could not remove his gaze from that bewitching smile of Shri Maharaj until the train had left the station.

39. MEETING WITH SHRI PANGARKAR

Shri L. R. Pangarkar, the renowned scholar and author, was then the principal of a school at Amraoti. He was a deeply religious man and had written biographies of a number of saints. He was the editor of a periodical devoted to religion and philosophy, known as *Mumukshu*. He had heard a lot about Shri Maharaj. The first opportunity he got to meet Shri Maharaj was in 1906. He has given a vivid account of this first meeting with Shri Maharaj.

In 1906, Shri Maharaj was at Vathoda to celebrate the Katyayani Vrata– the festival of devotion. A large number of the followers had gathered on the bank of the river Payoshni for the festival. Shri Pangarkar and a few Sanskrit scholars decided to visit Vathoda to participate in the Katyayani Vrata. They attended the discourses of Shri Maharaj on Dnyaneshwari. They were greatly influenced.

After the discourses, Shri Maharaj expressed a desire to meet the visitors who had come to Vathoda for the first time. When they had all assembled in his presence, they were not asked who they were nor what their names were. Instead, Shri Maharaj asked them to come to him one by one. He touched the pulse of each person one by one and told him his name. In this way he told each one of the visitors his name without mistake.

When the turn of Shri Pangarkar came, he bowed down and touched the feet of Shri Maharaj in reverence. Shri Maharaj took his hand, felt his pulse and said, "You are Pangarkar." Shri Pangarkar was amazed. How could a blind man, simply by feeling the pulse of a stranger standing in a queue, tell him his name correctly ? He felt it was a miracle. He thought the powers of Shri Maharaj were beyond human imagination, certainly beyond human perception.

He has written a detailed account of this first meeting with Shri Maharaj and has published it in the *Mumukshu* in 1908. He writes : "I have met a number of great saints in my life. I have written biographies of many saints. But I have not come across any saint who could tell the names of unknown men correctly only by feeling their pulses. Shri Gulabrao Maharaj was a great mystic. His powers were miraculous. I could not suppress my curiosity. So I prayed to Shri Maharaj to tell me how he could find my name in my pulse. But Shri Maharaj did not reply. He just smiled and said, 'But I was not wrong. Isn't it ?' My question remained unanswered."

During this visit to Vathoda, Shri Pangarkar stayed with Shri Maharaj for two days. The next day at 3 O' clock in the afternoon, Shri Maharaj was in the temple of Lord Mahadeo. About 50 persons were there surrounding him. Shri Pangarkar went and touched the feet of Shri Maharaj in great reverence. It was a pleasant afternoon and Shri Maharaj was very happy to meet Shri Pangarkar. He said : "Pangarkar, please suggest a subject and I would this evening give a discourse on it in the form of verses".

Shri Pangarkar could not believe his ears, that Shri Maharaj would instantly compose verses on a subject suggested by him. He just kept quiet. Shri Maharaj said : "Pangarkar,

I request you to suggest a subject. I would compose verses and give a discourse on it in the form of a poetic composition."

Now Shri Pangarkar thought for a while. He remembered a difficult verse in the twelfth chapter of the Dnyaneshwari. The verse indicates that he, who believes that the whole universe is his home, becomes the universe himself. The verse is extremely difficult for interpretation. Yet again there was a miracle for, Shri Maharaj had composed in three and a half hours 1300 verses in exposition of the verse suggested by Shri Pangarkar, Each one of those verses was so poetic, so meaningful and so profound that Shri Pangarkar thought all the poets in Maharashtra should bow down to Shri Gulabrao Maharaj in acknowledgement of his great talents.

When Shri Maharaj composed these verses, the flow had been like an uninterrupted torrent. He did not have to stop even for a moment. He could just go on narrating them, for the verses were the very essence of the philosophy which he had so deeply imbibed and lived in his own life. If these had been written down, a reader would have taken three and half hours only to read them. Alas ! Nobody was present there who could write as fast as Shri Maharaj composed and narrated them.

This was spontaneous poetry par excellence. A graduate scholar, who was present there, did not believe in the miracle. He remarked : "How can one compose 1300 verses in a short period of only three and half hours ? Such instantaneous poetry is impossible, unbelievable. Shri Maharaj must have composed those verses earlier, learnt them by heart and must have just recited them. It cannot be explained otherwise."

Then Shri Pangarkar explained to him : "But how could he have composed the poems beforehand ? I had myself suggested the subject of the discourse on the spot."

Shri Maharaj came to know about this doubt expressed by that scholar. The next time when Shri Pangarkar went with the scholar to meet Shri Maharaj, he said, "I had composed all the verses instantly. If anybody has a doubt he should suggest any other topic. I am prepared to compose verses on that topic just now." The scholar who had expressed a doubt had to eat his words now. He just bowed down his head in deep obeisance.

Shri L. R. Pangarkar has written, "By the grace of God, I have met many saints in my life. But the devotion and divine love which I experienced in the company of Shri Gulabrao Maharaj is unparalieled. I could not experience it in the company of anyone else." He further says, "If a person like Gopalrao Agarkar, who was a noted social reformer and an atheist, had come into contact with Shri Gulabrao Maharaj, the latter would have transformed him into a perfect believer in God and in religion."

Further he continues : "If Lokamanya Tilak, the intellectual giant and famous political leader of our time, had had occasion to confront Shri Gulabrao Maharaj in argument, Shri Maharaj would have confuted him completely. Indeed, Shri Tilak was a rare genius and had a pure-heart. But what Shri Maharaj had was divine. Was this divinity of Shri Maharaj the cumulative result of his pursuits in his previous births ? In any case, in this birth he appeared before the world as a divine culmination of pure knowledge, perfect work and unlimited devotion, unlike any other saint in the history of our country."

Add to that the many uncanny, mystic powers of his which even the most advanced modern scientific knowledge cannot explain and Shri Maharaj stands out as the very incarnation of the Supreme Being.

40. MEETING WITH SHRI KRISHNANAND SARASWATI

At Banaras there is an ancient "Matha" (abbey) known as Kaivalyadham. Shri Krishnanand Saraswati was the chief of this "Matha" He was a renowned scholar of those days. He had heard of the reputation of Shri Maharaj. when he visited Kolhapur, his followers there told him how Shri Gulabrao Maharaj was a great saint, a scholar and a yogi and how it would be worthwhile for Shri Krishnanand Saraswati to meet him.

Shri Gulabrao Maharaj was at Harda at that time. Shri Swamiji wrote to his followers in Harda that he would reach there on a particular day by train. A number of his followers came to the station to receive Shri Krishnanand

Saraswati. As soon as he alighted from the train, he asked one of his followers : "I understand a great saint has come to Harda. Who is he ? Where is he staying ?"

There upon Khanderao Vinayak replied, "Yes, Shri Gulabrao Maharaj has come to Harda. He has come to the station to receive you." Shri Gulabrao Maharaj came forward and touched the feet of Shri Krishnanand Saraswati as a mark of respect.

When Shri Swamiji reached the residence of his followers he inquired about the activities of Shri Maharaj. He was not happy to know that at times Shri Gulabrao Maharaj used to dress like a woman in the role of a "Gopi", a female devotee of Lord Krishna.

Shri Bhat, a scholar and a renowned priest came to meet Shri Swamiji. He said, "A number of Brahmins from Harda have become the followers of this man who comes from a lower caste. They have even accepted initiation from him as their spiritual "Guru". It is not proper. They should have gone to to a worthy Brahmin to take initiation from him.

Shri Swamiji was not upset. He replied calmly : "Perhaps that lower caste man has gained the necessary spiritual authority". Shri Khanderao Vinayak intervened to say, "Swamiji, now, I happen to be a Brahmin myself; and I have accepted initiation from Shri Gulabrao Maharaj There are a number of others also, who are Brahmins and yet have accepted initiation from him. That is because he is a great scholar, a saint and a Yogi, and that is also why we believe in him. You may test him and tell us what you think of him."

Shri Gulabrao Maharaj himself came to meet Shri Swamiji after some time. He touched the feet of Shri Swamiji and stood before him. He sat down only when Swamiji requested him to do so. A few moments passed without conversation. Then, Shri Maharaj asked him with folded hands : "Swamiji I have a question to ask. In the commentary on stanza No. 20, Chapter No. 13 of Shri Bhagavad Gita, Shri Adya Sankaracharya has stated that there are 25 principles of the Sankhya Philosophy. Will you kindly enlighten me on the 25th principle ?"

Without replying to this question, Shri Swamiji said, "I understand you have started a number of controversies about God and time." Shri Maharaj folded his hands and said, "Who am I to start any controversies ? It was Shri Shankaracharya himself who has discussed these issues." Then Shri Maharaj quoted a number of extracts from the writings of Shri Shankaracharya and stated how he interpreted them. He then asked, "Am I right Swamiji in my interpretations?" Shri Swamiji was greatly impressed. He could not refute the interpretations of Shri Maharaj.

Silence prevailed for some time. Shri Maharaj reminded Swamiji of his question regarding the 25th principle of the Sankhya Philosophy. Shri Swamiji said, "You may refer to **Kanthabhashya.** It will reply to you." Shri Maharaj called for the book and said he had read it and that it did not say any thing about the 25th principle." Shri Swamiji said, "I had read **Kanthbhashya** before 40 years and I do not remember these details about the 25th principle. Now to-day I am meeting my followers after a long time. Let us discuss your question tomorrow."

Next morning when Shri Swamiji and Shri Maharaj were in conversation, two scholars from Bombay came and asked a number of questions in philosophy. Shri Maharaj replied to them appropriately quoting references from the old scriptures and from modern books published in the west. He referred to a number of scientific developments in the west and showed how they supported what the Vedas and the Upanishadas have described. The scholars from Bombay were greatly impressed by the depth of the study of Shri Maharaj. Shri Swamiji was also astonished by the eloquence and the depth of knowledge of Shri Maharaj. He said; "I am extremely sorry. I had not realised what a great scholar you are."

Shri Swamiji spent the whole day with Shri Maharaj. They talked about a number of subjects. The discussions continued upto midnight. Shri Swamiji retired to his bed at midnight. Shri Maharaj most humbly massaged his feet as a mark of his respect for him. Shri Swamiji fell asleep. Shri Gulabrao

Maharaj continued the massage of the feet. Hours passed. Some time in the early morning Shri Swamiji awoke. He felt ashamed when he saw that Shri Maharaj was still awake and massaging his feet. In an embarrassed tone Shri Swamiji said "What is this !"

Shri Maharaj said, "I am from a lower caste. You are a great Brahmin scholar. It is my religious duty to serve you."

Swamiji said, "I could not even reply to your questions. I am not worthy to receive service from you."

Shri Maharaj said, "It is my religious duty to serve you and I am just doing my duty." Shri Maharaj continued massaging his feet....

After a moment Shri Maharaj asked Swamiji how Shri Maharaj should proceed to solve a difficulty which he was getting in practising Yoga. Shri Swamiji confessed that he had not reached that stage in his practice of Yoga. "Please forgive me," he said "I will not be able to reply to your question. You are a great scholar, a great saint and a great Yogi. I did not realise this in the first instance. Please pardon me. I am extremely sorry for my mistake."

Later during the conversation, Shri Gulabrao Maharaj said, "I believe in Madhura Bhakti. That is why I dress like a woman sometimes, and try to experience the love and devotion which the "gopis" had for Lord Krishna."

Shri Swamiji replied, "Madhura Bhakti is an age old mode of devotion in our country and there is nothig wrong in following it. Even great saints like Ramakrishna Paramahans of Bengal and Narsi Mehta of Gujarat used to dress like women at times while practising this mode of devotion."

Shri Swamiji and Shri Maharaj spent the whole day together. On the fourth day Shri Swamiji decided to leave Harda for Banaras by train. Shri Maharaj went to the station to see Swamiji off. He touched the feet of Shri Swamiji as a mark of respect. Swamiji hurriedly bent down and stopped him. He said, "Please come and sit near me. Your place is here by my

side. In the *Purana* scriptures we read about Lord Krishna and Narada who were scholars and Yogis of your stature. You are the third. I am stunned by your knowledge and eloquence. That is why I stayed here for three days instead of one day as originally planned by me. I pray to you, please visit my "Matha" in Banaras at least once during my lifetime. Banaras has a number of scholars who will be able to appreciate your knowledge of philosophy and of Yoga in the real sense of the term." Swamiji had tears in his eyes when the train left Harda station.

41. THE DEATH OF MANAKARNIKABAI

In 1906, Manakarnikabai became seriously ill. She was suffering from ulcers in the stomach. She used to vomit out whatever she ate. Day by day her health deteriorated. Shri Nanaji Kavimandan who had learnt Ayurveda from Shri Maharaj was treating her. He consulted Sakharam Appa, a practitioner in Ayurveda from Madhan, who had also learnt Ayurveda from Shri Maharaj. But the disease refused to respond to the treatment. About that time Shri Maharaj decided to celebrate the Janmastami, the birthday of Lord Krishna at Yaoli. While preparing for the Journey Shri Maharaj told Nanaji Kavimandan to take all the necessary medicines with him. "one of us would be seriously ill at Yaoli," he said.

The day after Shri Maharaj, Manakarnikabai and other followers reached Yaoli, Manakarnikabai's illness became serious. She vomitted blood and fainted. Shri Maharaj sent for his relatives. Sakharam Appa came to Yaoli, to help Nanaji Kavimandan. But Manakarnikabai got worse. She could not even open her mouth to receive the medicine. She was slowly sinking. On the fourth day she breathed her last. (Shravan Vadya Chaturthi, Shake– 1828 – 1906 A. D.)

Shri Maharaj had anticipated her death. His various remarks from time to time indicated this. Yet the blow when it actually came must have given him a jolt. However, Shri Maharaj faced it bravely. He gave discourse on Vedanta Bodha to all those who had come to console him. It certainly helped all to compose themselves. Shri Maharaj went to Madhan for completing the last rites of Manakarnikabai according to the Hindu shastras.

Manakarnikabai was not just the wife of Shri Maharaj. They two lived the life together on the spiritual plane. He was her spiritual master and she, his ardent disciple. She used to look after and care for Shri Maharaj as a mother would do. Hence Shri Maharaj must have felt a great emptiness in his life after the death of Manakarnikabai. That is perhaps the reason why he went to the moutains of Brahma Ram near Nagpur and stayed there alone for a few weeks.

He must however have realised that his life was after all not his own. He had come to fulfil a mission to rejuvenate the religion. He had arrived for the spiritual upliftment of the Society. He therefore swallowed his personal grief and continued his work.

Sarajabai, the mother of Manakarnikabai now stayed with Shri Maharaj in order to look after Ananta, the son of Shri Maharaj. Dattu, the brother of Manakarnikabai, also stayed with Shri Maharaj all his life.

42. HELP & GUIDANCE TO SHRI GANPATRAO

Shri Maharaj Continued to help and guide his followers. Shri Ganpatrao, one of the devotees of Shri Maharaj fixed his daughter's marriage with a boy from a well known, respectable family. Arrangements for the wedding were complete. Invitations had been sent to all friends and relatives and the guests started arriving at Yaoli.

Two days before the actual wedding ceremony, Shri Ganpatrao went to Shri Maharaj to extend personally to him the invitation to grace the occassion with his presence. On being asked he narrated the whole story, how it took a lot of efforts and time for him to fix the marriage, because it happened that there was some defect in the horoscope of the girl. Shri Maharaj looked grave. He thought for a while and said to Ganpatrao, "This marriage must not take place. You must see that it is cancelled." Shri Ganpatrao was shocked to hear this. He could not utter even a single word. Shri Maharaj said, "what are you thinking ? The marriage must be cancelled at any cost. Even if the other party claims reimbursement of the expenditure incurred by them, I will bear this expenditure, but the marriage must not take place."

Shri Ganpatrao had great faith in Shri Maharaj. He did not ask Shri Maharaj anything further. He cancelled the marriage. The guests and relatives were upset. The bridegroom was furious. Ganpatrao had to bear a lot of harsh words from his guests and relatives. But he did not change his decision to cancel the marriage. Two days passed. And what a shock ? News reached Yaoli that the bridegroom had died suddenly. Shri Ganpatrao now realised why Shri Maharaj had insisted on cancelling the marriage. He touched the feet of Shri Maharaj with great reverence again and again. After a few days Shri Maharaj selected a proper bridegroom for the daughter of Shri Ganpatrao and the wedding was celebrated in the presence of Shri Maharaj. The couple lived a normal life.

When Shri Maharaj was at Mandla, Ganpatrao came to see him there. He wished to go back to Yaoli, his native place, within two days for starting the agricultural operations. But he could not go until Shri Maharaj gave him permission to do so; and Shri Maharaj did not give him the permission for four months. Shri Ganpatrao was worried that the yield from his lands would suffer badly that year as he had not been there to supervise the operations. The mansoon was over by the time Shri Maharaj permitted him to return to Yaoli. And what a surprise ? When he did return, he found that the yield had never been so plen ul during the previous few years.

43. PUBLISHING OF THE BOOKS

Everyone who came into contact with Shri Maharaj could develop himself and reach upto a higher plane. The number of followers who accepted initiation from Shri Maharaj was increasing gradually. In the company of Shri Maharaj they experienced a spiritual change in themselves. This was indeed a great achievement in itself. But Shri Maharaj was not satisfied with it. He felt that if his writings were published, his thoughts could reach a larger number of people and further help him in the mission of his life.

In 1907, in a private meeting of some of his intimate followers Shri Maharaj opened his mind. They immediately decided to give concrete shape to his desire.

Shri Shrinivas Shastri Hardas took a lead in starting a printing press in 1907 with the sole object of publishing the works of Shri Maharaj. The press was named "Shri Dnyaneshwar Prasadik Press." The name itself expressed clearly the purpose of the press viz. spreading of the spiritual message of Shri Maharaj by publishing his works, which was in reality the blessing of Shri Dnyaneshwar Maharaj. Shrl Vithalrao Kekare, a lawyer from Mandla, and Shri Balwantrao Deshmukh, a lawyer from Chanda, made the necessary finance available.

When an organiser like Shri Maharaj takes up a project, How can it fail to get all kinds of necessary support ? Shri Haribhau Kavale, Shri Gangadhar Mulay, Shri Vyankatesh Deshpande and Shri Govind Ramchandra Bhakta devoted themselves to the work of writting down whatever Shri Maharaj dictated. Here the work especially of Shri Haribhau Kavale must really be appreciated. He was unusually swift in taking down the words of Shri Maharaj. But Shri Maharaj used to dictate so fast that normally four persons were needed to take down his words. The first would write the first line, and the second, third and fourth would write the second, third, and fourth lines, respectively. The process, would then be repeated. Finally the writing of these four persons would be combined together.

Haribhau Kavale came from a millionaire family, He was the owner of thousands of acres of land and a big house. Thus he was born with a silver spoon in his mouth and was brought up in a rich luxurious style. Yet he left everything and stayed with Shri Maharaj for the whole of his life. He renounced all material comforts and lived a very simple life at the lotus feet of Shri Maharaj. He was always ready with his pen and paper to write down whatever Shri Maharaj said.

The first book to be published by the press was "Bhakti Pad Tirthamrut." Then it was decided to publish the entire writing of Shri Maharaj in a series of volumes. The printing of the series once started at the press continued for years together even after the Maha Samadhi of Shri Maharaj. The series was titled as "Sookti Ratnavali", meaning a chain of gems. In all twenty volumes were published. This series contained all the 131 books dictated by Shri Maharaj. The

writings were in Marathi, Sanskrit, and Hindi, The tota writings of Shri Maharaj exceed 6,000 printed pages demy size.

Here particular reference must be made to the 115 letters of Shri Maharaj, which have also been published in volumes No. 1, 2, 7 and 12. These letters are gems of literature and spirituality of the highest order.

44. MEETINGS WITH SHRI ROY

Shri Roy from Bengal was a Professor of Philosophy in the Morris College, Nagpur. He was deeply interested in the Eastern as well as the Western philosophy. He was also interested in the modern developments in physical sciences. He used to visit Shri Maharaj regularly and they used to enjoy discussing their favourite topics for hours together. With his help, Shri Maharaj purchased a number of books published in America and England and studied them.

Shri Maharaj showed particular interest in the works of Darvin, Spencer, Myres and Hamilton. He purchased the then latest books on philosophy and scientific development and dictated extensively on them. Shri Maharaj has refuted the Evolution Theory of Darwin. He has also shown how the theory of materialism does not stand the test of time. He has dictated extensively to show how Indian philosophy is superior to the popular branches of western philosophy like agnosticism, nihilism, scepticism, etc. Shri Roy was interested in the work of Shri Jagdish Chandra Bose. He read the then latest books of Shri Bose for Shri Maharaj. Shri Maharaj dictated his thoughts on the theory of Shri Bose.

Shri Priyanath Mukherjee, another Professor from Bengal, had specialised in the study of Biology. He was a professor of Biology in the Morris College, Nagpur. Shri Maharaj showed his comments on the work of Shri Bose to Professor Mukherjee. When he read them, he was astonished. He could not believe that a person who did not specialise in Biology could have such a deep understanding of the latest developments in Biology. He was astonished by the interdisciplinary approach taken by Shri Maharaj. He said, "I can not believe this. Unless we accept that Shri Maharaj is the very incarnation of God, we cannot explain this."

45. WIDE TRAVEL IN THE NORTH

Prof. Priyanath Mukherjee had some differences with the newly appointed European Principal of the Morris College. So he resigned and went back to Calcutta. He was of the age of the father of Shri Maharaj. So the Professor and his wife regarded Shri Maharaj as their son. When they left for Calcutta they felt very sad for having to lose the company and guidance of Shri Maharaj. They prayed to Shri Maharaj again and again to visit Calcutta and spend some time with them.

After about four months, Shri Maharaj went to calcutta where he stayed with Professor Mukherjee for about ten days. The Professor invited many scholars and other celebrities to meet Shri Maharaj. There were marathon discussions on Yoga, Philosophy, Vedanta, etc. Thousands of people came to touch the feet of Shri Maharaj.

Fish eating is very common in Bengal. But Shri Maharaj did not eat fish or flesh. He would not, therefore, take food which would even be touched by a hand cooking fish. So, for ten days, while he was in Calcutta, Shri Maharaj did not take anything except milk. While in Calcutta Shri Maharaj visited some nearby towns also. On his way back from Bengal, he visited Jagannath Puri and went to the famous temple of Lord Jagannath. He also stopped at some other towns on the way.

After his return from Calcutta, Shri Maharaj stayed at Nagpur. It was there that he came across the then world-acclaimed book "Human Personality" by F. W. Myers. He dictated his criticism on the book extensively.

After a few days, Shri Maharaj visited Mathura, Brindavan and other places of pilgrimage in that area. At Brindavan he gave discourses for three days on the Rasakrida of Lord Krishna as described in the Bhagavata.

While returning, Shri Maharaj visited Jabalpur. He was waiting at the station for the arrival of the train when he heard some one crying. It was a young blind boy of about 18 years. Shri Maharaj went to him and offered him some food. But the boy would not take it. Shri Maharaj tried to console him.

saying "Why are you crying? Please do not cry." The boy said "I am blind, so my brother has deserted me and left me here." He started crying more loudly saying, "I want to go to him." Shri Maharaj tried to pacify him. He said, "If your brother has deserted you, why do you want to go to him again? I will take care of you. Now come with me to Nagpur and you can stay there with me comfortably all your life." But the boy was not convinced. He insisted on going to his brother only. Shri Maharaj tried to dissuade him, but in vain. By then quite a crowd had collected and was watching the scene. At last, since the boy insisted on going to his brother, Shri Maharaj contacted the police, arranged to trace his brother and sent the blind boy back to him. Whatever money he had with him, he gave it to the blind boy.

46. AGAINST IMPOSTORS AND PSEUDO SAINTS

In those days there was at Raipur a fellow who had set himself up as a saint and had become quite well-known. He was an impressive speaker and had managed to collect a large following in that area. He was a real impostor. Outwardly though he posed as a preacher of the ethics, his private life was full of debauchery and duplicity. He developed illicit relations with many women, some of whom came from good respectable families. Under the garb of a saffron-clad saint, he indulged in many immoral activities.

When Shri Maharaj visited Raipur, he heard a lot about that "saint" and his preachings. But with his inner perception he had gauged him. He realised how false the so-called "saint" was. Shri Maharaj was bitterly against those who turned spirituality into a profession to earn money and used itas a cloak to hide their nefarious practices and duped ignorant simpletons, particularly women, into parting with everything that is valuable.

Shri Maharaj collected a lot of information about the private life of the demon and put it before his followers. Within no time people came to know about the doings of this impostor and they hounded him out of Raipur.

Another incident of the same type happened at wardha A fellow called Shridhar Pant Paranjpe professed that he was a disciple of the famous saint Shri Ramadas who had lived in the seventeenth century. He even started a sect known as Ramadasi panth, claiming to be devoted to the philosophy of Shri Ramdas. A number of even educated people joined this new cult. Shri Paranjpe exploited this group for personal ends His private life was full of duplicity and immorality and he even had illicit relations with many women coming from respectabile families.

When Shri Maharaj visited Wardha, he came to know about this evil fellow called Paranjpe. The philosophy profounded by him had numerous discrepancies. Shri Maharaj invited the attention of his followers to these and in his righteous anger declared that those who led a lustful life under the garb of spirituality must be boiled in hot oil as punishment.

Soon word spread in and around Wardha. People started talking openly about the immoral life of this Paranjpe. Then Shri Maharaj sent messages and invited him to an open discussion of his false philosophy. But Shri Paranjpe had already heard of the fame of the great learning and scholarship of Shri Maharaj. So he avoided meeting Shri Maharaj under the specious plea that he had no orders from saint Ramdas to discuss his philosophy with Shri Maharaj.

But shrt other scholars decided not to let Shri Paranjpe off soeasily. Shri Chaundebuva, a famous saint from wai and Shri Moti Baba Jamdar of Nagpur took the lead and arranged a meeting on the 13th of June, 1911 at Nagpur. Shri Paranjpe wished to avoid this meeting. But Shri Jamdar threatened to have Shri Paranjpe boycotted from society if he did not attend the meeting at Nagpur.

Shri Chaundebuva invited Shri Maharaj also to attend the meeting. To avoid the social boycott, Shri paranjpe felt compelled to attend the meeting. Shri Krishnabuva Paturkar, Shri Sadashiv Rao Subhedar, Shri Govindrao Subhedar, Shri Shriniwas Shastri Hardas and forty other renowned scholars in and arround Nagpur attended the meeting. Shri Chaundebuva initiated the

discussion. Shri Maharaj pointed out some of the discrepancies in the preachings of Shri Paranjpe. All were now eager to hear what Shri Paranjpe had to say in the matter.

But Shri Paranjpe observed silence. He did not utter even a single word. He just kept touching the feet of Shri Gulabrao Maharaj from time to time.

Shri Gulabrao Maharaj spoke extensively for one hour and explained the discrepancies in the thinking of Shri Paranjpe. He requested Shri Paranjpe to reply. But Shri Paranjpe did not open his mouth. He sat mum. So there was no alternative but to end the meeting.

The next day, Shri paranjpe went to Shri Chaundebuva and put forth heated arguments before him. Shri Chaundebuva asked, "Shall I send a word to Shri Gulabrao Maharaj and request him to come here ?"

Shri Paranjpe said, "Shri Gulabrao Maharaj comes from a lower caste. Do you know this ?" Then Dr. Paranjpe, a follower of Shri Paranjpe, repeated that Shri Gulabrao Maharaj came from a lower caste family, and said, "He has no authority to speak on the Vedas. We will not allow him to speak." Thereupon, instead of replying, Shri Chaundebuva instructed one of his followers to go to Shri Gulabrao Maharaj and request him to come immediately. When Shri Paranjape heard this, he left the place before Shri Maharaj came.

When Shri Maharaj heard of this he sent a message to Shri Paranjpe, saying, "Let us discuss whether a lower caste man has authority to speak on the Vedas." Shri Paranjpe was now totally vanquished. Full of remorse, he said in his reply, "Shri Gulabrao Maharaj is a great saint. He has deeply studied the Vedas. I am not worthy to discuss anything with him," He left Nagpur for Wardha the same day. All the newspapers in Maharashtra gave wide publicity to the meeting in Nagpur and the subsequent discussions.

47. MEETING WITH SHRI ADITYA RAM BHATTACHARYA

Shri Maharaj travelled to Chhidgaon, Harda, Indore and other towns for about a month and a half. Then he went to

Allahabad and stayed there for about 8 days. Shri Aditya Ram Bhattacharya, a renowned scholar from Allahabad, came to meet Shri Maharaj. He said, "Maharaj I have visited many pilgrim centres. I have heard a number of saints, yogis, scholars and pandits. Still, I am not satisfied. I have many doubts in my mind. Is there no contflict between Bhakti Marga (the path of Bhaki = Devotion) and Jnana Marga (the path of Jnan = Knowledge)? Can one retain devotion towards God when he gets knowledge ? By nature, I am a believer in devotion and in idol worship. I cannot understand those learned men who have knowledge but have no devotion towards the Lord."

Shri Maharaj listened to him carefully. He agreed to give discourses on the subject. Shri Maharaj gave three discourses on Bhakti Marg and Jnana Marg. A large number of people attended these discourses. When the final discourse was over, Shri Bhattacharya touched the feet of Shri Mahraj. He was overwhelmed. He said, "Maharaj, I have now fully understood what is devotion, what is knowledge and what is the relation between them. All my doubts are clarified. I am feeling for the first time in my life that I am satisfied fully."

Shri Maharaj just smiled and asked him, "Can you tell me what you have understood ?" Shri Bhattacharya said in a humble tone, "Maharaj, what I have understood from your discourses, is like this. Unless one gets knowledge, Jnana, one cannot develop real devotion, Bhakti. He who practises devotion merely external and without attaining knowledge, performs only Upasana (i. e. ritual) which is only a formality and therefore is not real devotion." Shri Maharaj smiled and said, "Yes, you have now really understood the subject."

From Allahabad, Shri Maharaj went to Chhidgaon where he stayed for a few days. There he discussed with Shri Dattatray Khapare, the then latest scientific developments in the west. Shri Bose, a scholar from Bengal who had settled down at Hoshangbad, came to Chhidgaon just to meet Shri Maharaj. He took the opportunity to ask Shri Maharaj to clarify some of his doubts. A number of these were about the philosophy of Barkyle, a western thinker. Shri Maharaj clarified all his doubts one by one to his full satisfaction. The discussion which had started

at eight O' clock in the morning went on for nine hours continuously without a break. A number of the followers who had gathered to hear Shri Maharaj, were so enchanted by his talk that everybody lost all sense of hunger and thirst and sat there upto 4 p. m. without any nourishment. As for Shri Bose, he was so much influenced that he touched the feet of Shri Maharaj again and again and said, "Maharaj, all my doubts have vanished. I am now convinced that the root of all philosophy is the faith in God. Unless one has that faith, all philosophy is meaningless."

48. VISIT TO MADHAN

Shri Keshav Pande, an old friend of Shri Maharaj, was at Madhan, suffering from tuberculosis. His illness was in the last stage. When Shri Maharaj came to know about this he immediately returned to Madhan. Now this Keshav Pande had done many misdeeds and committed sins in his earlier life. When he saw his death approaching fast, he started repenting his past life. When he met Shri Maharaj he cried and sobbed like a child and prayed to Shri Maharaj. "Please forgive me my sins. Now I repent all my sins and all the wrongs done towards others."

Shri Maharaj pacified him. He read out portions from the "Vichar Sagar" (Oeean of thoughts) written by Shri Nischal Das and explained them to him. He told him, "since you have repented, you are purified. God has promised that one who remembers him with all sincerity even during the last moments of his life, he becomes one with God." Shri Maharaj, continued his stay in Madhan for a few days. He visited Keshav Pande every day and explained to him the importance of real Devotion.

On the 20th October, 1911, Shri Mahadeo Prasad, a senior Government Medical Official from Salimpur, came to Madhan to meet Shri Maharaj. He set forth his doubts about the philosophy of Islam. Shri Maharaj said, "Everybody should follow his own religion. The basic philosphy of all religions is the same, whether it be Hinduism, Islam or Christianity. So I tell a Hindu to follow the Vedas, a Muslim to follow the Koran and a Christian to follow the Bible." Shri Mahadeo

Prasad was fully satisfied. He touched the feet of Shri Maharaj with great reverence.

49. MEETING WITH SHRI KRISHNARAO REGE

At Harda there was a scholar named Shri Krishnarao Rege. He had read a number of scriptures. He used to meet each and every saint and scholar who happened to visit Harda. He asked all of them to clarify his doubts, but was never satisfied. So the residents of Harda used to say, "Krishnarao is a question mark himself." When Shri Maharaj visited Harda, Shri Krishnarao met him and asked a number of questions. Shri Maharaj replied to all his questions so that for the first time in his life, Krishnarao said he was fully satisfied.

Shri Krishnarao did not belive in idol worship. He asked Shri Maharaj. When God is omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient, why should we worship an idol? Is he not present in everything?" Shri Maharaj said, "It is true that God is omnipresent. All the diversity you find in this world is only external. The moment you experience that God is everywhere, you will no more feel that there is any diversity. Then you will find everything unified and merging into that one supreme being. Until one reaches that stage of sensitivity, one will continue to see diversity and differences in one stet from the other. Until that stage is reached one will find that there is more of the Satva Guna in certain beings and less in the others. Such a person will bind Satva Guna (pure righteousness) at the maximnm in the idol which he worships. So for such a person idol worship is essential as that is the only way in which he can purify himself and can elevate himself to a higher plane." The doubts of Shri Re e were clarified and being fully satisfied, he touched the feet of Shri Maharaj withr everence.

Now, Shri Krishnarao Rege had only one grandson His name was Vishnu. He was suffering from tubercu'os s, the wasting disease. In those days it was regarded as incurable. Most of those who got infected by that dreadful diease had no hope of surviving, as no effective treatment was available in any of the pathies. Shri Krishnarao had consulted many medical practitioners in Allopathy and Ayurveda but in vain.

When he came to know that Shri Maharaj had given medicines to a number of patients, he prayed to him to visit his house and examine Vishnu, his only grandson. when Shri Maharaj visited his house. Shri Krishnarao threw himself at the feet of Shri Maharaj. He broke down with grief and cried openly like a child. He prayed, "Maharaj, please have mercy on me. Please cure my only grandson." Shri Maharaj told him to observe certain Vrata and Upasana. (observance of certain hard rules like fasting etc.) Then he gave some tirtha (sacred water) to Vishnu and also prescribed certain Ayurvedic medical treatment. In cource of time, Vishnu started recovering. The doctors who had treated Vishnu earlier admitted that his recovery was miraculous. They said, "It cannot be explained how a patient like Vishnu who was in the last stage of tuberculosis could be cured."

50. REPENTANCE OF THE UNCLE OF SHRI MAHARAJ

We have already seen how Patilbuva and Bakaramji, the two uncles of Shri Maharaj had treated Shri Maharaj very badly while he had lived in Madhan. They had never fed him properly. He was made to do odd menial jobs like a slave at home and in the fields. What he received in return was just abuses all the time.

Subsequently, Shri Maharaj left Madhan. Soon the fame of his uncanny powers and wonderful learning started spreading everywhere. Now he had followers all over the country in the North, East, West and South. His books and discourses brought him reputation as a realised saint, a yogi, an inspired poet and an eminent scholar.

The fame of Shri Maharaj reached Madhan also Patilbuva and Bakaramji, the two uncles of Shri Maharaj, were still alive. They had expected that blind Gulab would be a begger on the streets. But contrary to this, Shri Maharaj had become one of the most outstanding persons of his time. Some of his followers respected him as the incarnation of God. The uncles of Shri Maharaj now started repenting for their misdeeds. They had no issue. Shri Gulabrao Maharaj was the only legal heir of all the ancestral property. So they sent a message to Shri Maharaj requesting him to come back to Madhan, forgive them, stay with them and take charge of the ancestral property.

When Shri Maharaj received this message, he sent them a letter.

"I am eager to serve you in your old age, not for the property but because it is my duty to do so. I do not need the family property. I would not allow my son also, to receive the family property. Please donate it to a worthy priest and come to stay with me. I would take care of you as your son."

This letter shows the greatness of the mind and the heart of Shri Maharaj. Not only did he forgive the misdeeds of his relatives, not only did he refuse to accept the property, but he also offered them filial sevice as their son would have done.

51. INVITATION FROM THE RULER OF DEWAS STATE

The reputation of Shri Maharaj reached the ears of the ruler of many princely states. Some of them invited Shri Maharaj to visit them. But Shri Maharaj ignored such invitations.

When Shri Maharaj was at Amraoti, His Highness Shrimant Tukojirao Pawar, the Chief of Dewas, a state in Madya Pradesh, sent him four letters praying to him to visit his state. Shri Maharaj did not reply. The Chief then sent two telegrams with the same request. When the second telegram came, Shri Maharaj sent him a letter in the form of a poem. He wrote, "I am blind from infancy. I lost my parents in childhood. I had no formal education. I did not get an opportunity to serve any spiritual master. So you can imagine what an ignorant person I am. A poor fellow like me should not dare to enter the premises of a great king like you. I do not know how to show respect to a rich man, and how to please him. They have misinformed you by telling you that I am a scholar. To tell you the truth, I do not know anything except Dnyaneshwari. You are my king and I am your humble subject. So instead of inviting me to Dewas you may graciously send me your blessings."

It is difficult to beiieve that Shri Maharaj, the conqueror of scholars and pandits by whom he was now worshipped almost as divine incarnation should also be so humble. Perhaps he wanted to avoid the pomp and luxury and the lime light of princely states. Perhaps he was testing the sincerity of the Chief.

After sending this letter, Shri Maharaj left for Harda and stayed there for a few days. When the Ruler of Dewas read the letter of Shri Maharaj, he came to understand how really great Shri Maharaj was. So he sent a telegram in the following terms to Shri Maharaj.

"Your Holiness most gracious and kind letter received. With intense feelings of gratitude the undersigned underserving person prays to you to come to Dewas and bless me."

This telegram was received at Amraoti. Since Shri Maharaj was at Harda, it was redirected to him at Harda. Shri Maharaj did not reply. When the King did not receive any reply, he sent Shri Trimbakrao Phadnis, his minister, to meet Shri Maharaj at Harda and to pray to him to come to Dewas. Shri Maharaj at last agreed to visit Dewas within eight days and sent Shri Narayanrao Pandit to see the arrangement there. Shri Narayanrao returned to Harda with Shri Trimbakrao Phadnis who came again to fetch Shri Maharaj. So on the 10th of September 1913 Shri Maharaj and his followers left Harda and proceeded to Dewas by train accompanied by Shri Phadnis.

His Highness Shrimant Tukojirao Pawar, received Shri Maharaj personally. Shri Maharaj stayed at the palace. After a few hours, Shri Narayan Prasad, the Chhief Minister of the Dewas (Major), came to meet Shri Maharaj. He asked a few questions on the Vedas and the caste system. Shri Maharaj replied to all the questions in his usual forthright manner. Shri Narayan Prasad then suggested that Shri Maharaj should not tell the king his opinions on the caste system for that might displease him. Shri Maharaj said bluntly, "I will always say what I believe. I

will not utter even a single word to please or displease anybody, if I do not believe in it; I am equally comfortable in a palace or on the bank of a river. My speech will be the same whether in a palace or on the bank of a river."

Nobody except Shri Maharaj would have dared to say this in the face of the Chief Minister of the State. One is reminded of the Rishis(Sages) like Manishi in the old days who could call a spade and tell even a King in clear words that he was wrong.

The Chief Minister conveyed this to His Highness Shsimant Tukojirao Pawar. But His Highness was not at all displeased. He said, "His Holiness Shri Maharaj is really a great sage like Narada."

Shri Maharaj gave discourses on Dnyaneshwari for four days. His Highness Tukojirao Pawar, members of the royal family, the ministers of the state and a large gathering attended these discourses.

The next day, Shri Gangadhar Sastri, the Education Minister of the State, came to meet Shri Maharaj. He put up this poser to Shri Maharaj : "Saints are always poised. But there are some who lose their temper at times. Why is it so ?" Shri Maharaj quoted a saying from the Sanskrit where it is explained that even saints should show a short temper outwardly so that people expecting worldly gains would be discouraged and keep away from them. Inwardly however saints must keep calm and remain quiet all the time.

Every day a large number of people came to meet Shri Maharaj and asked him many questions. On the last night. His Highness Shri Tukojirao Pawar invited Shri Maharaj to his chamber. With his own hands he washed the feet of Shri Maharaj, dried them with a towel, applied scent on them and thus worshipped him. The King had never given this honour to anyone else in his life except to the images of Gods in the temple. The King said, "By serving Shri Maharaj today I am purified. I am honoured."

His Highness Shri Tukojirao requested Shri Maharaj to accept him as his disciple. The King said he would be honoured if Shri Maharaj agreed to be the spiritual master of the State.

Shri Maharaj just smiled and refused the request politely. He said the King already had his own spiritual master. He should continue to follow him. There is no point in changing masters. He would get the utmost satisfaction even if he continues to believe in his spiritual master and follows his instructions faithfully. That night Shri Maharaj gave a discourse which went on upto 5 O'clock next morning. The King kept listening to him with rapt attention.

Early in the morning that day Shri Maharaj left Dewas by the car of the royal family. He came to Indore and stayed there. The residents of the city took Shri Maharaj out in a big welcome procession in which thousands of people participated.

52. VISIT TO BOMBAY

From Indore, Shri Maharaj went to Bombay. On the day of his arrival, he visited a book-shop to see the latest publications. Shri Pangarkar met him in the book-shop accidentally. Shri Pangarkar persuaded him to stay at "Madhava-Ashram", a famous hotel of those days. He stayed at "Madhav-Ashram" for eight days, and gave discourses on Dnyaneshwari every day. A large number of followers attended regularly and the crowd began to increase day by day.

Shri Kashinath Waman Lele, a great scholar from Wai, the home of learned scholars in Maharashtra, was in Bombay at that time. He attended these discourses. He was so greatly impressed that he said, "I have not heard such meaningful and scholarly discourses in my life. I had heard of the great reputation of Shri Maharaj. But when I heard his discourses, I realised he is much greater than what people think. I am convinced he is an incarnation of Vidura, the great sage in the epic, Mahabharata."

His Holiness Shri Shankaracharya from Karvir, the highest spiritual Authority of Hindu Religion (equivalent to the Pope of the Vatican City) was also in Bombay at that time. When he heard of the great reputation of Shri Maharaj, he sent scholar follower to invite Shri Maharaj to see him.

The next day, Shri Maharaj went to meet His Holiness Shri Shankaracharya. Shri Maharaj spoke of the teachings of

the Adya (the first) Shankaracharya. He talked about how some verses in the "Shankara Bhasya" could be interpreted in different ways and how there is unity in the aparent diversity in the different verses. His Holiness Shri Shankaracharya was greatly impressed. His Holiness garlanded Shri Maharaj and honoured him with a "Shawl" (a decorative piece worn round the neck and shoulders).

Out of respect for His Holiness, Shri Maharaj accepted the honour. However, when he happened to meet Shri Kashinath Waman Lele, the great scholar from Wai, in a book-stall in Girgaon (Bombay), Shri Maharaj said, "I have accepted this "Shawl of honour out of respect for His Holiness Shri Shankaracharya. But scholars like you are really worthy of this honour, not I. So, I offer it to you." With this Shri Maharaj put the "Shawl" round the shoulders of Shri Lele and persuaded him to accept it though Shri Lele Shastri kept on protesting that Shri Maharaj deserved it far more. At last Shri Lele accepted the Shawl. But while accepting he was overwhelmed with emotion.

Shri L. R. Pangarkar who also was in Bombay at that time, had also attended all the discourses of Shri Maharaj. He wrote an editorial in the *Mumukshu*, his periodical, on the 2nd October 1913. He said :

"Shri Gulabrao Maharaj is a scholar and a saint of such great height as is unknown and unheard of in the history of our country. He is an authority on Shruti, Smriti, Puranas, Hindi and Sanskrit literature, Parsi and Arabic learning, Christianity Muhammedanism, Jain literature, the philosophy of the various sects and cults in our country, Eastern and Western philosophy, Yoga, Sankhya, Ayurveda, Astrology, Mimansa, Vedanta, etc. He explains these various branches of knowledge with such lucidity and in so simple a language with appropriate illustrations and references that one is led to believe that his

great knowledge connot but be a culmination of a study carried through many previous births."

Shri Pangarkar further wrote in his Editorials 'Shri Maharaj present' in himself a great combination of Karma (action) Gyan (knowledge) and Bhakti (devotion to God). We feel, he is an Avatara (incarnation) of Vidura, in the Mahabharata. If any one wants to learn the principles of Hinduism, he should go to Shri Gulabrao Maharaj. If one wants to know how these principles could be put into practice, he should observe the life of Shri Gulabrao Maharaj, for his life is a true representation of the principles of Hinduism. Shri Gulabrao Maharaj is also a great speaker and a great poet. Throughout the history of our country, we cannot find such a wonderful combination of knowledge, (Gyana), devotion (Bhakti) and pure action (Karma) all at once in a single person.

53. VARIOUS WRITINGS

In the years 1913 and 1914, Shri Maharaj wrote a number of books. The chief of them are:– "Sadhu Bodh", "Prem Nikunja", "Ku–Shishya Akhyan," "Prashna Kadamb", "Sampradaya Surataru", Gana Sopan," etc. Of these again, "Sampradya Surataru" is really a great work. It contains 6068 stanzas and runs into about 800 pages of the demi size. In this book he shows how pure devotion to Lord Krishna, as described in his "Madhura Advait" thought, is a simple way to become one with God.

Shri Maharaj has written in this book, the following few lines :–

"Manu, Vyas, Shuka, Narada, Shankaracharya, and Dnyaneshwara were the incarnations of God who came to this earth to explain religion of their times. I have come for the same purpose in this 20th century," He explains, "All religions and all sects lead to the same goal "Union with God." Though the

philosophy in the different religions and di erent sects appears to be diff rent, really it is not so. All religions mean the same The language is different, the ways are different. But ultimately they reach the samc goal. So everybody should follow his own religion meticulously and reach the Lord by following the path laid down in his own religion."

Shri Maharaj has given many examples to show how there is inherent unity in the apparent diversity in the different religions and different sects. "Follow your own religion faithfully and you will reach the Lord." is the message given by Shri Maharaj in this book.

54. INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC

Shri Maharaj was an outstanding singer. He has composed 6500 poems and 23000 stanzas. He has se t all the 6500 poems to appropriate tunes. He used to sing these songs –poems himself. He had a sweet voice and he could express the mood of a song appropriately. He knew classical music also.

Shri V. N. Bhatkhande, the then most renowned musician and scholar in the country wrote and published three books on Indian classical music which were studied by S ri Maharaj. He raised certain basic issues about Indian classical music in a letter which he wote to Shri Bhatkhande. He posed certain queries to which Shri Bhatkhande had no reply. He suggested that Shri Maharaj should write a book and put forth his point of view. These letters have been published in **Sukti Ratnavali** (12the canto) and **Vishrabdha Sharada** (Second Volume).

To explain his point of view, Shri Maharaj had accepted the suggestion as a challange and decided to write a book. He studied Indian classical music every day for about two hours. He continued his study for a period of 2½ years. In January, 1915 he started to write his own book "Gana Sopan", (steps to music). The book ramained incomplete. It has been published in its incomplete form and still it has received wide

acclaim from scholars in music, who ragard it as an imortant landmark in the history of classical music, and a really outstanding contribution to the scientific study of Indian Classical Music.

While writing "Gana Sopan," Shri Maharaj had made deep study of some old works on music written in Sanskrit by some acknowledged scholars in music, like Sharngadev, Kallinath Venkata Mukhi, Matagna Muni, Somnath, etc. who had lived in the earlier centuries. Shri Maharaj also studied all the available issues of "Scientific American", a journal devoted to Western classical music which was being pub ished in the U. S. A. He also practised singing the classical modes under the guidance of Shri Namadevbuva, a famous singer and scholar in music in those days.

That the book "Gana Sopan" has been regarded as one of the most outstanding events in the history of Indian classical music is further confirmed by Shri P. L Deshpande, the famous playwright and noted scholar in music, and an outstanding music director from Maharashtra who writes, "Though the book is titled, "Ganasopan" i. e. Steps in music, it is meant for the scholars in music. The acquisition of any depth of knowledge in music is perhaps a very difficult task and much remains to be done in this respect in our country. That blind man in our country could succeed in achieving this distinction so confidently and easily, and could guide other scholars in music is indeed a great miracle of modern times. I am not competent to review this book and in my opinion no scholar in music, or an artist or a musician living in our country would be competent enough to revi w this book."

55. ILLNESS : STILL WORK CONTINUES

The health of Shri Maharaj was deteriorating. After the death of Manakarnikabai, he did not take food regularly. Often he skipped his lunch and dinner and devoted all the time to his mission. Thus, days after days, months after months he overworked himself for years without caring for his health.

In 1915, Shri Sukal Seth, a rich trader in Harda celebrated the wedding of his daughter. He invited Shri Maharaj to attend. But due to ill-health Shri Maharaj could not go to Harda.

So Shri Sukal Seth came to Amraoti and offered rich garments and other presents to Shri Maharaj on the occassion of the marriage of his daughter. Shri Maharaj was not ready to accept this costly present. –But Sukal Seth prayed to him again and again. So at last Shri Maharaj agreed to accept it. But immediately on the next day, he distributed the rich clothes and other presents to the priests in Amraoti.

A mahant from Punjab came to meet Shri Maharaj. He was follower of the Mahanubhav sect. Shri Maharaj explained to him the important features of the philosophy of that sect. He drew his attention to the deficiencies also. The mahant was greatly impressed. He said, "Shri Gnlabrao Maharaj is the most outstanding saint of our times."

Shri Seshadri Shastry, a renowned scholar from Rajamahendry, in Andhra Pradesh, came to meet Shri Maharaj. He asked a number of questions to Shri Maharaj regarding the Vedanta philosophy. Shri Maharaj was feeling very weak on that day due to high fever. In spite of it, he spoke to Shri Seshadri Shastry in Sanskrit for two hours and satisfied him.

In spite of illness, he continued to meet each and every visitor and guided him properly on the path of spirituality. His Highness. Shrimant Tukojirao Pawar, the ruler of Dewas, was greatly enamoured of the personality of Shri Maharaj. He was again sending letters and telegrams requesting him to visit Dewas. Shri Maharaj also received invitations from many princely states. But Shri Maharaj was not interested. He politely declined all these invitatious. At last, the ruler of Dewas sent Shri Bapurao Lengade, a renowned photographer to Amraoti to take photographs of Shri Maharaj. He offered costly presents to Shri Maharaj on behalf of the ruler and took a number of photographs.

Even during this short contact with Shri Maharaj, Shri Lengade was so much attracted that he became the devotee

of Shri Maharaj. He prayed to him to guide him on the spiritual path. Shri Maharaj explained to him the Bhakti Marga, the path of devotion, presented to him a copy of the Dnyaneshwari and advised him to read it regularly.

All this time the health of Shri Maharaj was deteriorating day by day. But Shri Maharaj continued his work with the same spirit and speed. He had accepted his mission with a religious zeal and was not prepared to spare any efforts to fulfil it. to them the principles of religion. He studied the mental makeup of each and every devotee and guided each one according to his capacity on the spiritual path. He also spent hours and hours in dictating his books. Haribhau Kevale, and others spared no efforts in noting down each and every word dictated by Shri Maharaj. Shri Shrinivas Shastry and Shri Balwant Rao Deshmukh collected funds and kept the press running all the time to publish the books of Shri Maharaj. The spiritual message was spreading fast all over the country.

56. KATYAYANI VRATA– THE ESTIVAL OF DEVOTION IN 1914

The KATYAYANI VRATA–the festival of devotion of 1914 was celebrated at Lakhapuri on the bank of the river Payoshni. Though Shri Maharaj was ill, he attended the festival. Thousands of followers had gathered at Lakhapuri for the celebrations. A large number of scholars and devotees also participated in the festival. Shri Maharaj gave a discourse on some verses in Dnyaneshwari. Shri Khando Krishna alias Baba Garde, a great saint in those days came to attend the festival. He had discussions with Shri Maharaj on the Vedanta. Shri Baba Garde became a devotee of Shri Maharaj He said, "I have not seen a saint as great as Shri Maharaj in my life." Shri Baba Garde composed a verse which meant, "Lakhapuri where the festival was being celebrated had become as holy as Banaras since Shri Maharaj was staying there."

While leaving Lakhapuri Shri Baba Garde touched the feet of Shri Maharaj with reverence. Shri Maharaj stopped him and said, "Please do not touch my feet, I am from a lower caste." At this Shri Baba Garde was overwhelmed with emotion. Tears flew from his eyes. In a tone full of reverence he said, "Maharaj, you are the real incarnation of God."

After the festival Shri Maharaj visited Daryapur, Alaspur, Kurha and some other towns for about a month to give discourses, before returning to Amraoti.

57. THE LAST ILLNESS

One day, at Amraoti, when Shri Maharaj was worshipping Shiva the idol broke down. Shri Maharaj said, "The last days have come." All devotees were startled to hear this. Some of them rushed for a thermometer. But the thermometer showed normal temperature. Dr. Bhat and Dr. Joshi examined Shri Maharaj. Unfortunately, what Shri Maharaj had said came true. The doctors said that Shri Maharaj was suffering from tuberculosis for which there was no cure at that time.

Shri Maharaj said that he would like to treat himself by Ayurveda, the oldest medical science of India and expressed a desire to stay in Poona. He said, "Poona is just 16 miles from Alandi, the place of Samadhi of Shri Dnyaneshwar Maharaj and I would like to spend my last days near Alandi only."

Shri Maharaj came to Poona with Shri Babaji Maharaj Pandit, Nanaji Kavimandan, Dattu Bhuyar, Maroti Ramekar, Rangubai and some of his other devotees.

Some rooms were rented in a bungalow on the Shankarseth Road in Poona. It was decided to take the treatment of Maharshi Annasaheb Patwardhan, the then renowned Ayurveda practitioner.

Maharshi Annasaheb Patwardhan visited the place examined Shri Maharaj and prescribed medicnes. Nanaji,

Kavimandan would bring the medicines prescribed by Maharshi Patwardhan. Shri Maharaj was not eager to take medicines. But Nanaji would persuade him to take medicines at the prescribed time. Dattu Bhuyar, the brother of Manakarnikabai, would clean the room, change the clothes of Shri Maharaj every day and would do the necessary nursing. Rangubai looked after the kitchen. She prepared the food for Shri Maharaj as per the advice of Maharshi Patwardhan and persuaded Shri Maharaj to eat it. Shri Babaji Maharaj Pandit would stand attendance at the feet of Shri Maharaj twenty four hours. Shri Maharaj in spite of this serious illness, tried to complete some of his books. Shri Babaji Maharaj Pandit took the dictations of Shri Mahara. There was a shower of anxious letters inquiring after the health of Shri Maharaj from all corners of the country. As per the inssructions of Shri Maharaj, Shri Pandit replied to all these letters. He advised them not to come to Poona.

Shri Maharaj was only 34 years old, and was in the prime of his youth. He was six feet tall. He had a broad chest. His hands were unusually long, almost upto his knees. His hairs were curly. His face always radiated a glow of happiness. But unfortunately day by day his illness got worse. His strength deteriorated. The medicines given by Maharshi Patwardhan failed to get any response.

Unfortunately Shri Maharaj could not go to Alandi on the last Guru Paurnima, the full moon day, which is the day marked for the worship of the Guru (spiritual master). He sent Shri Mandhare to Alandi on his behalf. In fact Shri Maharaj wanted to go to Alandi personally to take the Darshan of Shri Dnyaneshwar Maharaj. But his devotees persuaded him not to do so. Shri Maharaj had tears in his eyes. He did not accept even a drop of water until Shri Mandhare came back from Alandi and gave him the sacred watcr.

The day of Janmashtami, the day of the birth of Lord Shri Krishna was approaching. The image of Lord Shri Krishna which Shri Maharaj used to worship at Amraoti was brought to Poona. Shri Maharaj was so weak that he could not even sit up for the worship. So he instruc'ed Nanaji Kavimandan to worship Lord Krishna on his behalf.

In the last days, Maharshi Patwardhan used to come three times a day to see the health of Shri Maharaj. Shri Maharaj became weaker and weaker. Though his condition was worsening fast, Shri Maharaj was conscious upto the last moment. He kept talking to all those devotees who came to visit him.

58. DARKNESS : DARKNESS ALL AROUND

In the last three days, no outsider was allowed to meet Shri Maharaj. So Shri L. R. Pangarkar, Keshavrao Maharaj Deshmukh and some other devotees who had specially come to Poona could not meet Shri Maharaj. They were permitted to have the Darshan of Shri Maharaj from a distance only.

Every one of the devotees was worn down with anxiety. Every one was restless. Nobody knew what to do to give relief to Shri Maharaj from the ailment from which he was suffering. All were going through their daily routine mechanically. Every moment was critical as Shri Maharaj lay on the bed with eyes closed.

The last day i. e. the 12th day of the white half of the month of Bhadrapada dawned. (20th Sept. 1915 A.D.) In the early morning Shri Maharaj called Shri Babaji Maharaj Pandit in a feeble voice. Shri Pandit bent down over him to bring his ear close to the mouth of Shri Maharaj. All the other devotees in the house were standing around him. Shri Maharaj said, "Pandit, I have not given you any thing. I have not tought you any thing. But all my books are available to you. Please read them and you will understand everything."

Shri Pandit realised that those were the last moments of Shri Maharaj's life. Shri Pandit could not bear this. With great difficulty he controlled the tears in his eyes and the sobs in his heart.

After a few moments Shri Maharaj again called him and said : "It is said that at the time of death, one has to bear the agony as if thousands of scorpions are biting him. It is true." And that was all. Everything was over. Shri Maharaj had heaved his last breath.

The day had dawned, but the devotees felt it was darkness, darkness and gloom everywhere in all directions. All the devotees were sobbing with uncontrollable grief.

As per the last wishes of Shri Maharaj, this sad news was not communicated to anybody. Those who were present in the house joined the funeral procession, the 'MAHAYATRA'. The last rites were completed in simplicity. Shri Anantrao the son of Shri Maharaj lighted the pyre. Within a few minutes the body of Shri Maharaj was surrounded by flames.

Shri Babaji Maharaj carried the ashes of Shri Maharaj to Prayag and consigned them to the Ganges.

Though the body of Shri Maharaj is not there, every devotee of Shri Maharaj believes that Shri Maharaj is not dead. Hundreds of devotees have experienced that Shri Maharaj is still living and he answers each and every prayer offered to him in sincerity. Anybody who prays for his 'Darshan,' gets it. All the devotees believe that his help and guidance is available to them whenever praycd for. They believe Shri Maharaj is immortal. He can never die. So the devotees of Shri Maharaj do not obterve the death anniversary of Shri Maharaj. Indeed the soul never dies and incarnations like Shri Maharaj continue to watch over and guide the foot steps of the erring humanity.

The Works of Shri Gulabarao Maharaj

प्रति खंडस्य सूक्तिरत्नावली यष्टि इति नाम। (य = यष्टि = खंड)

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